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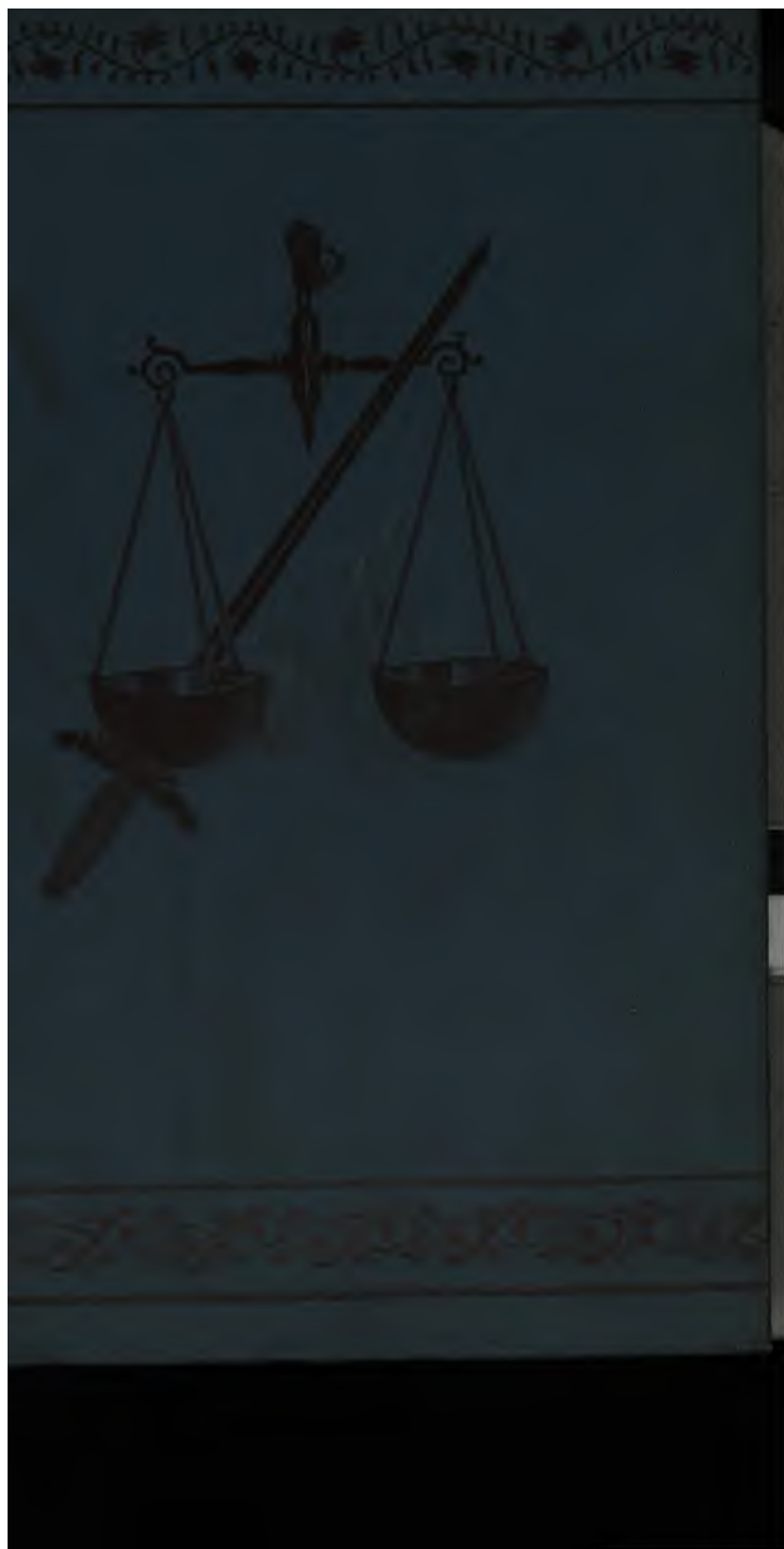
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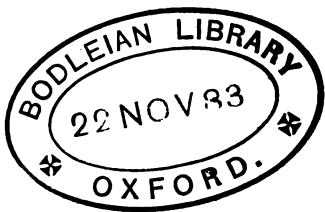
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BOOK THE FOURTH

(Continued).

APPROACHING THE TRUTH.



CHAPTER XIII.

WAITING TILL TO-MORROW.

THE news of the change of fortune for Hester Brake—for Lucy Brake and Morice—was not long in circulating through the farm, and there was much discussion on the subject, and a new topic of interest which the invalid lady alone appeared to shun.

“It is not good news to me, John,” she said, for the second time, when the farmer had offered his congratulations, in his blunt way, an hour or two later after Mr. Larcom had been overwhelmed by the intelligence.

“Larcom tells me you think so,” said Woodhatch; “but you do not know.”

“Shall I have time to know?” she asked.

“To be sure you will.”

“Where is the will I gave you to mind?” she asked.

"In my safe, there."

"Take care of it, now there is much money to leave behind me," she adjured satirically, "and so many people to think of."

"It is not likely to be lost."

"That's well. And should I live to become possessor of this money," she said, "there is a long account to settle between us, John, and as speedily as may be."

"Oh, not at all!"

"You were very kind to me and Morris," she continued; "you saved us from the evil examples—and bad lives; you stood our friend when we were short of friends, and knew not where to turn. For your care of us there are only the grateful thanks of a disagreeable woman, but for the money we have cost you I can at least make amends."

"When you get your money," laughed John Woodhatch, "we can have half a dozen hot words over the settlement."

"Ah, you think, with all the rest of them, what a bad-tempered, envious, querulous woman I have been. Don't you?" she asked.

"What a question!"

"Don't you?" she repeated. "Why cannot you answer in a straightforward manner?"

"Well, I have not so bad an opinion of you as all that, Hester, or I should have never chosen you to take care of Kitty Vanch."

"I was more amiable then."

"So you were," assented Mr. Woodhatch.

"And I have altered very much."

"You have altered," he remarked; "but that is——"

"And I have stood between you and your pet scheme of marrying Kitty to Greg Dorward."

"Well, probably you have," said John Woodhatch.

"And I have told Lucy that my brother Morris was not the good, faithful, high-souled being she had pictured him," she added.

"What on earth did you tell her that for?" exclaimed the farmer. "Of all the disagreeable, aggravating women, I believe you are the worst."

"Yes, that's your opinion," said Hester. "Very likely I am. It is hard to judge one's own character; self steps so persistently into

the foreground. But I thought it was best she should know poor Morris was not a hero."

"Best for her, do you mean?"

"And for you," she added calmly. "The dead husband was in your way, John. And you will never be happy without she becomes your wife."

"I have given up all hope of that."

"How long?"

"Years. I wish I had told you before," he replied; "you would have let Lucy alone."

"Hope will come again to you."

"Lucy Brake and Morice and her father will go abroad, and live abroad presently—very shortly, indeed," he said; "they have been talking of it to-night almost as a settled thing. The mere thought of the money brings already changes with it."

"Change is the lot of all of us. There is no rest."

"No," answered John Woodhatch thoughtfully.

"And you can live abroad, too, John," she said after a long silence.

"Impossible."

"You will have nothing to stop in England

for except Farm Forlorn, and its crowd of failures," she said.

"I will live for my failures, then," was the reply. "I have always said to myself that here was my one task."

His voice faltered for an instant, and she reached out her hand and touched his own very gently and very timidly.

"Good man, striving to do good, and failing more completely than you think," she said. "Still there is God's reward for all this presently. And so, God bless you, John."

To his astonishment she raised his hand to her lips, and brought the blood in a rush to his face. He looked round hurriedly and in no small confusion, but there was no one to observe them.

"Let me lean upon your arm to-night—the one friend whom I have not set against me yet!" she said. "Will you see me to my room door, and save Kitty coming down?"

"Yes—if you wish," he replied almost reluctantly.

"They will only think you are becoming more attentive to me, now that I have some money to leave behind," she said, with

her old satirical vein asserting itself once more ; "but what they think of you or me does not matter in the least."

"Why, no," answered her old friend.

They went upstairs together, and she leaned, he fancied, more heavily upon his arm than he had known her to do on the few occasions that he had offered her his escort.

In the corridor, and a few paces from her room, they met Kitty coming towards them. She was surprised to meet them, and Miss Brake put her gently, but not unkindly, aside, and walked on to the door of her room by the side of the farmer.

There she paused, with Kitty for a witness, and with her hand still upon his arm.

"Good night," she said.

"Good night, Hester," he replied.

"There is one thing more I should have liked to tell you to-night, John," she said, regarding him wistfully ; "but I am afraid."

"Yes, yes, don't let us have anything new to-night," he said with alacrity ; "it is getting very late."

"To-morrow, or the next day, perhaps, if you will."

"Very well," he said; "and if it is important."

"It is terribly important to you."

"Oh, never mind me."

"And to most of us at Skegs Shore," she added. "Good night again, and—to-morrow—then!"

"Ah, yes—to-morrow." John Woodhatch hurried away, glad to escape his companion before any fresh news should escape her.

But the morrow found Hester Brake a woman very wild and strange, who knew not friend from foe, and cowered from all alike in the frenzy of the fever which had come to her, suddenly and swiftly, like the trouble which had followed her through life, and had never let her rest; that had even met her on the threshold of her new prosperity, and struck her down like this.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SICK WOMAN.

THE illness of Miss Brake had disturbed at last the serenity of Farm Forlorn. It was the beginning of the end of peace at Skegs Shore. It was that for which everybody had been waiting; for there had been no belief in the false calmness of preceding days.

This was the first shock; a test trial, as it were, as to the strength of mind and purpose, the strength of heart and power of sympathy, to be evolved from the illness of Hester Brake—a singular woman, who had come as a guest to the big farm, and whom no one understood, and few had fair words for.

Nevertheless Miss Brake's illness did not leave her without friends; on the contrary, brought friends round her, and rendered her an object of interest. And when the doctors,

whom John Woodhatch had summoned to his house, shook their wise heads together in consultation, and said it was a bad case, an extremely critical case, the interest grew keener; and more than one face, looking sadly towards the end, took deeper shadows to it when it was prophesied there was but little hope on earth for Hester Brake.

"One might almost wonder what she was born for," said John Woodhatch musingly, on the fifth day of her illness; "so unhappy a life from childhood to the end as it has been. With a bad father, it has been a hard struggle to exist; the victim of desertion, poverty, ill health, and misfortune, what has existence been worth to this poor little woman, Alec?"

"I'm theenking it would have been a deal warse without ye, John," answered the parson, whom he was addressing; "if ye had not stood her freend through theeck and theen, in a true Woodhatch farshion."

"Do ye blame me?"

"No. It has cost ye a deal of money, but ye have never cared much which way ye peetched it, having planty of it, thank goodness," replied his friend.

"Why should I save money?"

"Are ye so impravident and rackless, that ye think a rainy day mayn't come to ye as well as to other folk?" asked Mr. Larcom.

"Ah! yes, it may," replied John Woodhatch; "and I will meet it as well as some people, and better than a good many."

"Which soonds a leetle conceited, John," said the parson dryly.

"I am conceited."

"Yes, it's yeer failing at times," was the remark; "although ye are not so bad as ye were."

"I have had so much of the conceit taken out of me," John Woodhatch remarked.

"Through not leestening to sarber, senseeble advice, I expect."

"Proffered gratuitously by Parson Larcom, too," answered John with a little laugh. "Oh yes; I am often in the wrong. I don't see very far ahead, as I once thought I did, in my foolish vanity. But then, who does see far? Who guesses what is coming?"

"Have ye looked ahead in any way as regards that poor soofferer oopstairs?" inquired Mr. Larcom, and in a somewhat lower and

more earnest tone ; “and who is slipping slowly out of the world, under your hospitable roof.”

“What do you mean ? ”

“There has been paid to her accoont now a matter of twenty thoosand poonds, I reckon ; the same amoont as Morice will have when she coomes of age, after deducting the neecesary axpenses,” said Mr. Larcom. “The money has reached England, and she’s a rich woman already.”

“If she had only had her money a couple of years ago ! ” said John ; “it’s but little use to her now.”

“It’s not on her mind at all, I’m theenking ; she doesn’t seem to be deesturbed about it in her ravings.”

“How do you know ? ” asked his host.

“I put the queestion to Lucy, who is knocking herself up with looking after the poor soul,” he replied ; “and she says Hester does not seem troobled about her wealth in any way. It’s the old beesiness of the murder, over and over again ; or else it’s yeerself who are keeping away from her, and will not go to see her at the last, fret as she may for ye.”

"Poor Hester! I have seen her every day, but she does not know me," remarked Woodhatch.

"She took ye yasterday for young Morris's murderer, one of the maids tells me, and nearly screamed the hoose down."

"We have all been Morris's murderer in our time," responded the farmer calmly; "even you, Alec Larcom, have not escaped suspicion."

"Why should I?" replied the parson, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm a hasty man, and I might have thought the warst of young Morris, as many other people did, Skegs Shore way. And I'm not at all certain," he added, lowering his voice, "that Hester Brake may not theenk so just the same; and to my serious prejudeece, and Lucy's."

"In what way?"

"There's a fortune to leave, John," said the parson; "and the doctors think she may recover her sances when the fever has warn itself out, and her alang with it. And, though I am not a marceenary man—the Lard forgive me if ever I was—it's not preceesely natural to set money carelessly on one side."

"I don't quite judge your character, Alec,"

said John Woodhatch. "When you were a hardworking honest missionary abroad, and saved me by good words and good example, you never spoke of money, never thought of it."

Parson Larcom looked down for an instant, abashed by the reproof.

"It was no use speaking or theenking of it, John," he answered, "when it was sheer wrastling for a croost of bread. And, though I'm not marceenary, I've a daughter and a granddaughter to theenk of a great deal, and of meeself just a leetle. Ye can't say I ever deespised reeches."

"No."

"And I certainly have been theenking that if the Lard pleases to take Hester Brake, our leetle Morice would stand as heir-at-law to her property, if she died without a will ; which she will not."

"What makes you think that ?"

"She is far too careful a woman," he answered—"too harribly beesiness-like altogether ; and sax months ago she would have been afraid of the money cooming to my family. And, knowing money was on its way

to her, she would have made a will. I'm as certain as I'm standing here of that."

"You are quite right. She has."

"Oh! ye know, then, John?—ye know?" was the eager inquiry of the minister.

"Her last will and testament she completed a week or two ago," said Woodhatch, "and gave it me to mind. It is locked in that safe yonder, where I had hoped it might rest for many years, whilst peace of mind made Hester Brake a different woman."

"It is peace of mind which passes all oonderstanding," said the parson, almost mechanically, and as if in duty bound to improve the occasion; "but it coometh not to all men or women in this greevous warld. And ye are executor to the will, I suppose—prabably sole legatee, as ye want for nathing, and won't know what to do with a frash fortune."

"I don't think I am," was the reply; "I hope not. But I don't know anything about the disposal of her money; I have not thought of it."

"Ye should ask her, preesently—or some one else should," suggested Mr. Larcom.

"Ah?"

"I've no objection myself, for that matter, to ask her whether at the last, like this, a sanse of justice to us all may not have come to her. It will in time, too?"

"We will wait for that time, Alec—which is God's, not ours," John Woodhatch answered almost sternly.

"Amen! amen to that," cried Alec Larcom, in return; "that is what I mean, of course. The poor creature may pass away without a scrap of common sanse to brighten her at the last."

"It is more likely than not."

One would have thought so, later in that day—which was known at John Woodhatch's farm as "Miss Brake's worst day"—when her high-pitched voice welled from the closed room to the corridors without, telling the sad story of disordered fancies and terrible conjectures, born of a confused and half-real past. The next day she was calmer, if weaker; the following day calmer still, and with a steadier look in her dark eyes, as if wondering where she had been of late days, and what had happened to her to leave her no stronger than a little child.

On that second day she spoke in her old manner, but in a voice to which one stooped to catch the faintly whispered words. And it was Kitty, pale and worn and grief-stricken at the bedside, to whom she said—

“Where are they all?”

“They are downstairs, most of them,” was the reply; “is there any one whom you would like to see?”

“Not yet.”

Hester Brake did not speak again for a long while; she dozed throughout the morning, waking now and then by fitful starts, and regarding Kitty with the old, far-away look which her watcher had noticed all that day, until the eyes closed and she slept fitfully. Before the sun was very low in the heavens, she said softly to Kitty—

“How long have I been like this?”

“A week to-day.”

“So long! Have you been here all the time?”

“Lucy and I have been nursing you between us. And once Mrs. Chadderton.”

“Mrs. Chadderton? You should not have let her come into the room,” she whispered.

"She has been very kind to you—and very anxious," said Kitty, "as we all have been."

"She must not come again. I do not like her," was the whisper back; "I cannot trust her."

Hester Brake was exhausted with these few words, and remained silent until the sun was going down, all crimson, in the west, and there was a glow as of fire on patient and nurse.

"Have I given you much trouble, Kitty?" she asked suddenly, and in a voice that had gathered to itself a little extra strength from long repose.

"No, no."

"I have been delirious?"

"Yes," confessed Kitty, "a little."

"What did I say?"

"I cannot remember—I don't think it was possible to understand you, madam."

"Try and think what I said," urged the sick woman.

"I could not follow you. It—it was only like talking in your sleep. That was all."

"You must have got very tired of me, Kitty."

"No, Miss Brake."

"Why, you were tired of me when I was well and strong," she added, her old jealousy predominant even in this hour. "I was your enemy, who had done you a great wrong which you could not forgive."

"Pray don't think so. What you have done has always been for the best," said Kitty; "and it was as well—I dare say it was right—that I should know Greg did not care for me. I was a little sad, mistress, but I bore you no ill will, God knows."

"God knows too much for us poor women," was the strange reply; "but as you have not learned to hate me with the rest of them downstairs, I am very glad. I should not like you to turn against me."

Kitty bowed her head lower to hide the tears away from the gaze of the woman lying there, and a long silence followed this again. When Hester Brake would have spoken, Kitty said quickly—

"Hush! please, dear mistress. You must not talk so much. I have done wrong already in listening to you."

"I wonder what time I have got? Re-

mind me," she added, "to ask the—doctor that."

She did not need reminding of the question, and Kitty would not have assisted her had she forgotten it. When the doctor was at her bedside, and congratulating her in his false, cheery tones on her better condition that day, she said almost with her old sharpness evident—

"How long have I to live?"

"My dear madam—that is really—it is, surely—I cannot say, at all," he stammered forth.

"I have much to arrange," she said calmly, "and to deceive me would be a crime on your part."

"Madam, it is not in my power to tell you how long you may be spared," replied the doctor. "I can only urge you to keep calm, and to assure you that any excitement is most dangerous."

"I am quite calm."

"Yes."

"And keeping calm as this, I may live—how long?"

"I have said I cannot say."

"I am not likely to recover?" she asked quickly; "there is no hope for me, you consider?"

"I am sorry to say there is no hope," replied the doctor softly; "but there is no immediate cause for apprehension."

"Shall I be alive this time to-morrow?"

"You may live some days—with care."

"I will be very careful," was the reply.

When the doctor had withdrawn, and Lucy Brake had stolen in to take her post as nurse, and allow Kitty to withdraw, the invalid looked at the new-comer with grave interest, and even smiled faintly as she stooped and kissed her.

"You have forgiven me, Lucy, then?" she asked.

"All that I have to forgive—yes, long ago," answered the young widow.

"I wanted the truth of it all—and you to know the truth," she murmured; "nothing more."

"Yes, yes; but we will not speak of it again," said Lucy.

"Not yet. Presently."

"Presently!"

“I shall have more to say soon. And I shall be very strong to say it,” remarked Hester Brake, with an amazing confidence not warranted by this feeble life flickering away.

CHAPTER XV.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE.

PARSON LARCOM, disturbed in his mind by thoughts of money matters, had his wish next day—the wish that lay nearest to his heart just then. Good man as he was in many respects, an earnest, red-hot Methodist, who meant what he said, and acted up in many ways to his own teaching, there was a keen consciousness of the value of money in his eyes, born of much early privation, and what more worldly people would have called, a long run of ill luck. His life had been a struggle; would have been a harder struggle still without John Woodhatch to befriend him in the old cruel days; and it was not in his nature—scarcely in human nature—to see money, to which by right his family was entitled, drifting away from him, as he was sure it was

drifting away, without any power of his to stop it.

He had been poor all his life, and there should have come riches to Lucy and Morice—he was scarcely thinking of himself, he considered—and Hester Brake was doing them all an injustice by allowing her will to remain, as it was, in John Woodhatch's safe; bequeathing twenty thousand pounds away from those who, by law, were most entitled to it. The first twenty thousand could not be touched till Morice was of age, although the interest, it had been decreed, should go to her support and education; and he was getting an old man. Miss Brake would think of that—a woman without friends, too—presently. Justice comes very close to one's heart when the great waves of eternity roll on to the sands, whereon the poor mortal is waiting. He had said that only last Sunday in chapel.

It was Mrs. Chadderton who came to him with, what he thought, good news.

“Miss Brake wishes to see you directly, sir,” she announced.

“To see me!” he exclaimed, leaping to his feet.

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Is she—does she appear vary anxious aboot seeing me, Mrs. Chadderton ? ” he asked, full of his one idea of the motive for the interview.

“ I cannot say,” was the sullen answer ; “ I am not allowed to go into the room.”

“ Indeed ! How’s that ? ”

“ I am not good enough, or not to be trusted,” was the response.

“ That’s sheer nansense, Mrs. Chadderton,” remarked Mr. Larcom ; “ every one here knows ye are harnest and troostworthy.”

“ As if I were her enemy—as if I did not love her more than my own life ; and would give mine—God, how willingly !—to save hers for a little while ! ” she cried, with **one** passionate and sudden outburst, which took away a great deal of the breath of Parson Larcom.

“ Do ye know her, then, better than the rest of us ? Have ye in old days, Ann Chadderton, ever met her, been indebted to her, seen——”

“ Nothing,” was the reply, as she turned aside and went rapidly from him.

Mr. Larcom did not reflect very long upon this unlooked-for outburst of grief or indig-

nation from the woman, generally so stolid, who acted as housekeeper at Farm Forlorn; under other circumstances her demeanour would have more quickly interested him. Now was the great, grand opportunity of his life; and Hester Brake had, of her own free will, expressed an anxious wish to see him. The conviction of having wronged him and Lucy, and Lucy's child, had come quickly home to her, it appeared; and here was the hour of restitution. On the stairs towards her room, he paused and thought a moment.

"What will John Woodhatch say to this, I woonder," he said to himself, as if half afraid of his friend, or of his opinion of him. And if the hard, stern Methodist had loved any of his kind, it was the master of Farm Forlorn; and valued any man's opinion, it was the **opinion** which John Woodhatch might always have of him.

"Wa'al," he added, as he proceeded on his way, "he will always theenk the best of everybody. It's his failing; but he will, poor John. And," he added, irresolutely again, "I am in the right completely, which way he looks upon it. There cannot be much doobt of that."

When he passed into the room, he had not even a doubt to disturb him ; and it was quite in a business-like way that he walked to the bedside and looked down upon the thin, white face of the woman lying there.

“ And how do ye find yeerself this morning, Hester ? ” he inquired.

“ More composed, Mr. Larcom. Perhaps even a little stronger,” she replied, “ or I should not have sent for you.”

“ It’s as well to see all friends when ye can, and arrange all theengs that may be neecessary with them,” said the parson.

“ Yes, I think so.”

Mr. Larcom sat down by the bedside, and took his pocket-Bible from his coat. The eyes of Miss Brake wandered towards it, and she said faintly—

“ Not now, please. Presently the words of promise may be of help to one more sinner, and—I shall be glad to hear them. But,” she said again, “ not now.”

“ I thought a few appropriate varses would not be oot of place. But I will not prass the question,” said Mr. Larcom ; “ and as it may be beesiness of an impoortant nature, perhaps

Miss Vanch will not mind leaving us a while ? ”

Kitty had been standing on the other side of the bed, and she looked to her mistress for instructions.

“ You need not leave us,” said Hester ; “ there is no great secret to tell. You know what I am likely to say to Lucy’s father ? ”

“ Yes, I think so,” answered Kate ; “ but—— ”

“ But remain,” was Miss Brake’s mandate.

Kitty bowed her head ; and then, by way of compromise, walked to the window of the room, sat down before it, and looked out upon the quiet landscape. Mr. Larcom did not feel as sure as he had done upon the stairs that the great question as to the disposal of her worldly goods was in any way affecting the mind of Hester Brake.

“ I wish to speak to you of Lucy,” she commenced.

“ Oh yes,” said Mr. Larcom, brightening again, “ to be sure. She is your sister-in-law—and I am glad ye theenk of her in kindness.”

“ She has been very kind to me,” remarked Miss Brake. “ Almost as kind as Kitty there,

and I begin—perhaps for the first time in my life—to value the warmth of heart she has, and to see for myself her earnestness.”

“She’s a good garl,” said Mr. Larcom, “and for one so young has passed through many trials. Which have improved her, too,” he added, “as trials will do vary aften.”

“There is much talk of you both going abroad—even of living abroad—is there not?” asked Hester.

“Wa’al—yes,” he replied. “It may be neccessary for the prarperty which our little Morice will inheerit a long day hence—and Skegs Shore is vary dooll.”

“To you?”

“To Lucy. She requires change,” he said. “Here are some tarebeel associations, and we have never had the means to get away fram them.”

“They are in the distance,” she replied, “and you have borne the worst of them already. I don’t like John Woodhatch to lose all his friends at once.”

“I was not axactly theenking of freend John.”

“Ah! but you must. He has hard trials to

come, and will want true hearts about him, and new hopes to replace the old which will be torn up by the roots. And you," she continued, "are a minister of God's Word, his oldest friend, and indebted to him, as we all have been. Under no circumstances are you privileged to desert him."

"Gard bless me, Hester!" exclaimed Mr. Larcom, "I'm not likely to desert him. I am always his friend, as he is mine. But he don't like patronage, and he is proud of his own way."

"And he loves your daughter Lucy," she added quietly.

"He did—once, at any rate."

"He does now."

"He never says so."

"Because he is the proud man of whom you have just spoken," she said, "and will not add to Lucy's anxiety by speaking of his love for her, unless——"

"Unless?"

"Unless a change occurs in her, and she sees where her affection should naturally turn. She has thought too long of my brother Morris."

“That’s true enough,” asserted Mr. Larcom, “but we need not talk of it now.”

“It is all I have to say to you,” remarked Hester.

“Ah, indeed!” was the almost rueful comment here.

“And it is upon my mind,” she continued, “it is before me always, that Lucy is going away from him—she who can only make his life light, in return for all the dreary, desolate days which he has had. Mr. Larcom,” she added, with more earnestness, “you do not know John Woodhatch yet—the nobleness there is in his repentance, the earnest task which he has set himself, the good that is always at his heart.”

“Yes, yes,” asserted Mr. Larcom; “but let us be more calm about this.”

The Methodist was puzzled. He did not understand this praise and glory of John Woodhatch, or see clearly the motive for it all. Why should Hester Brake be so anxious concerning John’s future, and Lucy’s love for him? Was it not an old story which was ended—a sealed book, the leaves of which could never be turned again?

"She will learn to love him, if you will help me fairly," she continued eagerly. "She is your daughter; you will have influence over her. She will see it is best."

He was not quite certain it *was* best, himself. The world had changed with him and Lucy, and John Woodhatch was five years older than when he had thought it would be wise and well for Lucy to accept him. Lucy would never marry, probably; but if she did, with her good looks, and in her different sphere abroad, she might do better for herself in all respects. He was not quite certain about John Woodhatch now as a son-in-law. John was a friend very dear to him—how dear he did not know yet—but Alec Larcom was a calculating man, and, after all, there was the daughter of Lucy to consider first.

"We must leave it to time," he replied. "I don't see there is anything to be done at prasant."

"There is a good deal to be prepared for."

"Oh! is that it?" he asked doubtfully.

"Haven't I said so already?" she de-

manded peevishly. "You heard me say there were fresh troubles coming to him."

"How can ye know that, Hester?"

"I must tell him all the trouble before I die. That is my last duty," she replied.

"What have ye been keeping back from him—and me?" he inquired.

"I will tell him everything, and leave him to act as he thinks best. And the best," she cried, "is only desolation."

Mr. Larcom gave a vigorous twitch to his right ear. Was she delirious? Was she wandering again in that poor, weak head of hers?

"Man is born unto trooble," he remarked sententiously, "and John Woodhatch will bear all that is meant for him as well as moost folk—better than a good many."

"With Lucy,—yes," answered Hester. "And though she is not fit for him, is not good enough for him, has never cared for him, still he has set his heart on her, and he must have her, Mr. Larcom."

Mr. Larcom was surprised at this peremptory assertion, but he would not utter anything by way of opposition.

"We must leave it to Lucy. I have noothing to say myself," he said.

"She will not look back at Morris now as a saint struck early from her life, but as a poor, vain mortal, who was not, even in the first months of his marriage, an honest, faithful husband. If Morris had lived," she said, "hers would have been an unhappy and distrustful life to the end. He was very weak."

"It is not conseedered wall of us, Hester, to speak ill of the dead," he said reprovingly.

"I loved him very much," she answered. "With all his faults he was very dear to me; but it was right she should know the truth when the false picture of what he really was kept her life in darkness. And I told the miserable truth to her."

"And I don't suppoose she was excessevely obliged to ye, Hester?" he said dryly.

"She will guess the reason presently. And with your help, Mr. Larcom," she added, "Lucy will be a happier woman. And that help you will promise a poor dying friend?"

"I wander ye did not tackle Lucy instead of me," he said, with a half-groan of discon-

tent. "All this kind of beeeness is enteerly oot of my line."

"Lucy would turn against me at the last. She is not always just."

"She's a woman," added Mr. Larcom; "and a leetle variable."

"And you promise me?" she urged again.

"To do always my best for the harppiness of John Woodhatch," said the minister more earnestly. "I give you Alec Larcom's sarlemn ward, I will. And I would have done so always, Hester, without such a poor promise as ye ask of me."

"Yes—probably," she continued with a sigh; "but you would not have known what was best for him. He would have hidden it away from you and Lucy, had I not told you for myself."

"Ye—es. Thankee, child," he muttered. "And are ye sure there's nathing more to tell me—to ask me?"

"Nothing."

"No warldly affairs to ask my adveece upon now ye are a rich lady?" he blurted out at last.

"All that is settled, Mr. Larcom. My

worldly affairs cannot trouble me again," she murmured.

"Then I need not keep ye talking any longer, Hester?" he said, rising.

"No," she responded; "I have wearied you too much already. But I wanted your word of honour to me; I felt it would strengthen me at the last. And," she added, "as you keep your word, so will God remember you, old friend."

He bowed his grey head at this, and looked hard at her, as if suspecting she suspected him, or had another motive for so grave an exordium at the last. Then he leaned over her, kissed her forehead as if in farewell of her, and went from the room. When he had gone Kitty hastened to her side.

"Oh, my dear mistress, you have talked too much; you have excited yourself beyond your strength, I am sure."

"No; I am better already," she answered with a strange smile. "I am getting quite strong."

"I wish you were."

"I have only one more task before me—and that will not be to-day," she added, as

Kitty glanced nervously towards her. "And He will give me strength for it, I am sure."

"Will you not try and rest a little?"

"I am a little weary perhaps. What time is it?"

"Nearly twelve o'clock."

"Yes—I will rest."

She closed her eyes and went off immediately into a sound slumber—so deep a slumber that the doctor came into the room without disturbing her; and seeing how calm and regular her sleep was, went away without arousing her, and with a promise to return at a later hour. The day stole on, the afternoon sun shone into the room, upon the pattern of the wall-paper, the pictures, the ceiling overhead, and then flickered away along the line of house-roof without, and died away for good. Kitty was replaced by Lucy, and Lucy, on some errand of her father's, was called away after an hour's watchful service; and when Hester Brake awoke it was in the twilight of the day and with the room full of shadow.

"Kitty," she said softly; and Kitty not replying to her, she called out in a stronger tone, "Lucy, is that you?"

A figure rose from a chair behind the curtains, and a voice said, very humbly and with much tremor in it—

“No, madam. It is I.”

“And you are——”

“Ann Chadderton,” said the housekeeper, as she came slowly round the bed and took her place by the side of the sick woman.

“What are you doing here?” demanded Hester Brake. “Have I not given orders, days ago, you should not be admitted to this room? Are you not always a terror to me—a living horror I cannot bear to meet?”

“Young Mrs. Brake was called away a moment since. She did not wish you to be left. I was at hand,” exclaimed Mrs. Chadderton, unmoved by Hester Brake’s strong condemnation of her; “and Mrs. Lucy will not be very long.”

“Where is Kitty?”

“Asleep. I would not have her disturbed by any one,” was the deep response. “It is the only rest which the poor child may get to-night.”

“Poor Kitty! Yes. But,” she said in a tone less firm, “you must not stop with me.

I would rather lie here alone until Lucy returns."

"I will go," said the housekeeper. "Heaven forbid I should in any way distress you. But will you tell me why you hate me? or what harm, in any way, at any time of my life, I have done to you? I may have done you harm some years ago, when I was bad; but oh! I don't remember it. Yours is not a face belonging to bad times."

"*When* you were bad!" said Hester Brake, with bitter irony.

"Yes, Miss Brake, for you know what I was, I dare say."

"I am content in knowing what you are. Pray go. And if you have any wish to do me service——"

"As I have!" came the quick interruption; "and if it is only in my power to do it."

"Then keep away for ever after this—from me," murmured Hester. "Don't let me see you in this life again. I shall not trouble you long. And you stand before me like a spectre which I cannot face."

"Why? Please tell me why, Miss Brake," she urged again. "If you only would do that!"

"John Woodhatch will tell you soon enough."

"Very well."

Mrs. Chadderton walked away from the bedside with her gaze directed towards the carpet. As she passed round behind the curtains at the bed's foot, and which were drawn closely and hid her from the sick woman, she came to a full stop, and Hester Brake waited in vain for the clicking of the door lock that should tell of the housekeeper's departure. It was a painful suspense which might have tried the nerves of one in full health and vigour, and suspicious of the person unseen in the background; but Hester Brake lay very still, and with her dark eyes watchful and wondering, but hardly betraying any fear of what might follow this.

Her faintly beating heart stirred more, perhaps, as Mrs. Chadderton's slight figure once again appeared, and this time advancing towards her, not moving away, as Hester had adjured her, and as she had promised that she would.

Mrs. Chadderton's face was very white and lined—seemed, as it were, to have taken ten

years more of age upon it, and twenty years more of grief and misery, as she returned to her old place at the bedside and looked down on Hester Brake."

"I shall see you no more," she cried; "and this is the last time you and I are to meet in this world. You say so?"

"Yes. I say it—I hope it, Mrs. Chadder-ton; but I am very powerless."

"Your wish is law with me," replied the housekeeper.

"I wish it, then."

"Then listen to me for one moment."

CHAPTER XVI.

BETTER FRIENDS.

It was a strange meeting between two women more than commonly strange in themselves. The red sun had sunk behind the farm, and the low-ceilinged room was full of shadows ; the housekeeper's figure, bending over the bed wherein lay Hester Brake, seemed steeped in blackness and ominous of evil. But they were not words of evil, or menace, which escaped Mrs. Chadderton at that time, and they were trembling lips through which they stole.

"I am to see you no more ; I am to go from you. You feel I am not worthy in any way to stand in the sight of a good woman," said the housekeeper, speaking very hurriedly ; "and so be it, madam. It is just enough. I have not a word to say against it. I have been very bad. I should not be much better

now if turned away from this place. But vile as I have been, and I am, let me say with all my soul, God bless you. God take you in His keeping when your time comes."

One hand of Hester Brake's lay outside the coverlet, and Mrs. Chadderton stooped and kissed it, and left hot tears upon it, before she hastily brushed them away with her own hard hand.

"Why should you bless me?" said Hester wonderingly. "What have I done?"

"You do not know? You have never guessed?" was the quick inquiry.

"I have never guessed."

"Oh, then, I am glad to tell you, if you will let me. I am glad to thank you—would be glad to die for you, as I told the parson downstairs, if I could only change places here. For," she added, "you have taken care of Kitty, watched over her, trained her, made her the good girl she is, and—I am Kitty's mother!"

She bowed her head so low that it was buried in the pillow of the bed, which shook for a moment with her strong emotion. The hand of the sick woman had great difficulty

in resting on the thick grey hair of the housekeeper, but it stole there in sympathy with her grief, in token of a better feeling for her.

"Courage, Mrs. Chadderton," said Hester. "I did not know anything of this."

"How should you?" was the rejoinder, as the speaker recovered herself, and stood back a little from the invalid.

"Does John Woodhatch?"

"Yes."

"And Kitty herself?"

"Oh no, no; she will never know it!" exclaimed Mrs. Chadderton; "she must never know it now. I am not fit for her in any way."

"She would be glad to learn the truth," said Hester; "it would be a new beginning to her life when I am gone."

"Madam, do not speak of it."

"Very well."

"Leave Kitty to me, to the master of this house," said the housekeeper. "Should it seem best at any time to tell her, it is my right; and on my knees, and in my own poor way, will I confess it. And," she continued,

“that time may never come—may for ever lie back from me, like Heaven, a something I dare never dream of.”

“Being so very bad, you mean?” inquired Hester faintly.

“Being so much in her way as I should be,” replied Ann Chadderton, “and as I never will be, so help my God. I deserted her when she was a child; when I would have gone back, I was locked up in prison away from her; and when I was free, she was in vile hands and beyond my power, till *he* found me out and saved her for me.”

“John Woodhatch?”

“Yes, the master.”

“Yes, the master,” repeated Miss Brake, “whom you will always serve faithfully?”

“You need not ask me that,” said the housekeeper.

“No. Only remember *that*. For there is trouble coming, and he will need his friends about him.”

“I will leave you, madam,” said Mrs. Chadderton, after pausing for a moment as if to consider the meaning of the sick woman’s warning; “and for your kind words, my

thanks. Let me say I am sorry you disliked me, for you were to me the saviour of my child, the teacher to her of what was right, when she had only known the wrong. I thank you, Miss Brake, for all."

She was withdrawing very quickly and noiselessly, when Hester's sharp voice said—

"Stay."

Mrs. Chadderton was motionless again at this command.

"Shall I tell you why I did not like you?" said the weak voice from the bed.

"If you please."

"Would you care to know?"

"I should have been glad to know when you first came, for I would have tried to alter," was the answer; "now it does not matter. You have let me speak to you, and you have spoken kindly in return; I will not weary you by stopping longer. I will say God bless you, and go."

"One moment. We may not meet again; or we may at the judgment, you and I."

"We may."

"I will tell you why, from the first, I have suspected you."

Mrs. Chadderton waited, with her thin hands clasped together.

"For years you have known who killed my brother Morris; for years you have not made one single step to proclaim the murderer," said Miss Brake; and for an instant it seemed as if there were a new strength in her, and she had power to raise herself in bed to make this accusation.

"I have not known," replied the housekeeper; "I—I only thought I knew."

"You were sitting up that night; you were waiting for some one to return to the farm—you were expecting some one who came later on," said Miss Brake.

Mrs. Chadderton nodded gravely.

"It is quite true," she said. "Who has told you?"

"The old man who died at the cottages beyond the farm—Spikins."

"A terrible man!" muttered Mrs. Chadderton, "whom no kindness ever softened or pity touched. He knew, then?"

"Yes."

"He never said a word to me."

"He suspected you as well."

"He suspected everybody," was the moody answer; "it was his nature. But he was not at the farm that night."

"He was down at Skegs Shore, near the parson's house, late in the night, and he saw my brother murdered."

"Don't tell me any more; I do not wish to hear it. I will not be a witness against any living man to this!" exclaimed the housekeeper. "*He* never had a hand in it; I will take his word before them all."

"Whose word?"

Mrs. Chadderton was on her guard at once. She had not trusted many people in her life, and even this helpless woman should not know that she had ever thought John Woodhatch had killed Morris Brake. Something might come, even of that.

Hester looked hard at the housekeeper—a shadowy figure, with the dying light of day for a background to her; but it was not possible to see her face, or guess the trouble on it.

"You thought John Woodhatch killed him

perhaps," said the low voice from the bed ; and Mrs. Chadderton started at this suggestion.

"Forgive me, madam ; but I will not speak of it."

"Had he killed my brother, you would not have betrayed him ?" was the curious inquiry.

"No, I would not," the housekeeper answered readily.

"Yes, you are faithful," murmured Hester ; "and poor John will not lack a trusty servant whilst you live. But he did not kill my brother."

"Thank Heaven !" exclaimed Mrs. Chadderton. "I—I mean Heaven knows he did not."

"Thank Heaven, too," said Hester ; "it would shatter every hope in human worth, or man's repentance, to have such ill brought home to him. Go now, please."

The housekeeper passed from the room without another word, and some distance down the corridor she met Lucy Brake advancing.

"Is she sleeping still ?" asked Lucy anxiously, as they approached each other.

“No, she is awake,” was the reply.

“And at rest?”

“The rest to Hester Brake will not come in this life,” muttered the housekeeper, as she passed on.

CHAPTER XVII.

REUBEN'S RETURN.

MEANWHILE Greg Dorward pursued his master's business and the even tenor of his way. The tragedy at Farm Forlorn—the grand, old, awful tragedy of death—was close at hand, but he was to all outward seeming only a calm spectator of its advance. He sat on the back benches, patient and watchful, one of a crowd, as it were, removed from active participation in the scenes and characters of a busy drama, but none the less he was deeply interested in its progress, and wondered not a little how it would end, and in what way it would affect him. There had been many changes of late, and he had been affected by them already; his whole life had been changed for that matter, and the current of his thoughts had drifted him into a new channel, and would

have been strong and deep enough to whirl him away had he been a weaker man.

But time had made of this reformatory waif a man of iron nerve—one who could disguise his anxieties, subdue his emotions, and be to most folk who encountered him a grave, business-like, every-day fellow, with nothing on his mind to trouble him. Perhaps his early training, his callousness, born of the neglect, ill treatment, crime he had encountered, was responsible for this accomplishment—for an enviable accomplishment it is, when one's way in life is not as straight or free from pitfalls as it should be, and there is more to meet on the road than simple-minded people dream or honest souls suspect.

But the world had changed with Greg, and for the worse. He was sure it was for the worse, though no one had much to say about it, or comment upon it. He had loved one woman, and been rejected by another whom he only loved a little, and after a fashion of his own, and there was a third woman, sick unto death, who had brought this change to pass. They were all very silent about the house-place—even Kitty, who seemed to think

but little of him, and let him go his way, as though the end had come of any interest in that future which he had sketched out with so firm a hand for himself.

But he knew the end had not come, and that there was more to follow. No one better than he knew this, unless it was John Woodhatch or Hester Brake. And what would follow must affect the master's future as well as his own, and Greg Dorward must be prepared, if possible, for change, even for revolution.

And he, in his self-confidence—which was immeasurable—thought he was prepared, and bided the time which was approaching. The storm would come, but he would weather it; it would affect other lives more than his own, and so much the worse for other lives, his being strong and storm-proof. What would be the end of it he did not know: he would have been more content if he could have guessed, but in whatever way the mystery worked itself out, he was sure—almost sure!—that harm, moral or material, would not remain with him.

He won the approbation of John Wood-

hatch at this juncture by attending strictly to business, and not leaving a stone unturned which would result in an advantage to his principal. He put, as John Woodhatch considered, his love troubles completely on one side, and allowed them not to disturb him at the markets or on the farm lands; he was content to wait, and he had not a word to say against his ill luck. Just the character which John Woodhatch admired, and had always admired—as Greg Dorward knew as well as he.

Still, despite the equanimity, or the false equanimity, of Greg, there were various matters to perplex him. One question in particular came uppermost more often than he could wish. What was to become of this Tolland's farm, which had been bought and stocked by John Woodhatch so that two young persons might begin life together? They had been summarily set apart, but the patron thought that all would come right in time; and though Greg helped him to this impression, it was not the conviction of the younger man. Greg had taken Kitty's decision as final; he knew Kitty better than

the rest of them ; he was, even in his heart, a little afraid of her and of any strange turn which she might make at any moment, confusing, perhaps confounding, all his calculations.

He was not fond of Farm Forlorn at this period ; he was glad when business took him away from it and set him galloping across the country, for on horseback he was at his best, and troubled less by his own surmises. He did not even care to see Lucy ; she reminded him of his one folly, of the poor ambition which had come to nothing, and disturbed him more than most things. He preferred meeting Kitty to facing Lucy Brake now ; although grave and thoughtful, she was good friends with him, to show it was not jealousy which had led her to cancel the engagement. But, as we have intimated, he was a little afraid of Kitty and in what way she might act. She had parted with him for his own sake, so that his existence might be brighter and clearer, without the little black speck of her presence upon it ; and in his heart he should be grateful for the sacrifice, and hoped he was, although doubting if Kitty Vanch had acted

for the best ; if it was really for the best that this faithful friend—this “old pal” from the streets who had always stuck to him—should shrink from becoming his wife and prefer any life to life with him. Was she far-seeing too—more far-seeing than himself, even—and knew too well, and by a strange foreknowledge, how it would end ?

Every time that Greg returned to Farm Forlorn he expected to find the white blinds drawn down before the windows, significant of one more “poor sister” passed away ; but day followed day without much change, without much news, save that Hester was slowly sinking and might die at any moment, according to the doctor’s prophecy. Greg did not own it, but there was a feeling of disappointment at times when he came round the bend of the road and saw the windows bright and open still, and all as he had left it in the morning. The waiting was long, and real life could not begin for any of them at the farm till Miss Brake was dead ; and die she would not in a hurry to oblige Greg Dorward, that seemed pretty evident.

The end was nearer than he fancied, how-

ever, and one Friday—an unlucky Friday!—when he came at a swift pace on horseback once more to the old quarters, the sands were filtering but a few more grains through the frail glass of life. At the farmhouse gate he was met by a surprise. Prepared for a great many things, he had not been prepared for this; and it was like a warning to him not to reckon too implicitly on the course which the current might take, when the banks were broken and the torrent dashing through.

It was a minor surprise, but it set Greg Dorward thinking: the surprise of the appearance of Reuben Fladge, standing there with his hands in his pockets and the old grin upon his face, as though he had never been dismissed from Farm Forlorn, for working in the dark against its master; as though his wild, nomadic life afterwards had been a dream; as though he had never been set to mind Tolland's farm after Spikins's death.

“Fladge!” he exclaimed, as he leapt from the saddle, and his old companion reached out his big hand towards the bridle of the horse, “what has brought you here?”

“Master sent for me this morning.”

"From Tolland's farm?"

"Ay, that's it;" and Fladge threw his head back and laughed in his old manner again.

This half-witted fellow had gone back five years of his life, surely. Never did those years seem more like a bad dream to Fladge than with himself at Skegs Shore again, and at his post. Never in all his life had he felt more proud and happy, and inclined to roar with laughter at his happiness; and then break down like a blubbing schoolboy, being confused and wild, and not realizing the new position yet.

"Has anything happened?" Greg inquired.

"No. He wanted me, and here I be. Ho, ho!"

"And how long are you to remain, Fladge? How will you get back to Tolland's to-night?" asked Greg.

"I'm not going back no more," cried Fladge; "I'm here for good! He takes me back without a word—without a hard word to say again me; jest as I was, when you were no more than a kid. Think of that!"

"I am thinking of it," replied Greg slowly.

"They said," remarked Fladge, dropping

his voice into a husky whisper, as they passed into the stable-yard, "that the master never forgave; but he does—of course he does! Look at me, Mr. Greg. Just see!"

"Yes, but don't make that infernal noise," cried Greg.

"I can't help it," answered Fladge; "I'm not settled down. When he sent word I was to come, I thought I should have gone clean, raving mad for joy. Only to fancy I'm back again," he cried, as he led Greg's horse into the stable, where Greg followed him, still anxious for a clearer light upon the case.

"Did he say why he wanted you?" inquired Greg.

"No."

"Have you asked him to come back?"

"I durstn't," said Fladge. "I thought it was settled clean I shouldn't be in this house again; that he never, never would do anything but hate me. I didn't expect it, Master Greg—I didn't for a blessed moment, even."

"I suppose not."

"He thought I killed Morris Brake. He thought the very worst of me."

"He did."

"And isn't it like the five years back too, now? Lord's sakes, it's awful like, ho! ho, ho!" Fladge cried. "And the parson and his daughter in the house, jest as it was. All but Morris. He can't come back—no more."

"Do you wish he could, Fladge?"

"Yes."

"So do I."

And then Greg Dorward walked away, and left this new prodigal to attend to his horse, and exult by himself at the great change.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT LAST.

WHEN Greg entered the farm parlour, he found the occupants were Lucy Brake, her father, and Kitty. They were sitting very grave and silent, as if waiting for something or some one; the tea-things were on the table, and an urn smoking vigorously. Perhaps they were only waiting tea for John Woodhatch!

Were Greg's nerves quite so completely at his own command that day, or was he more than usually acute, to fancy there was a something in their looks and manners foreign to their ordinary moods?

There were no books or work about; the three inmates of the parlour were simply sitting still that afternoon, and with faces which had a story to tell.

"Good afternoon," he said, "How is Miss Brake?"

"Miss Brake is warse," answered Mr. Larcom, for the trio; "much warse."

"That is bad news," said Greg. Then he glanced towards Kitty, whom he thought it strange also to find in the room—who surely should have been by her mistress's side in the last awful hour when the night closes in for humanity.

"Yes, it is bad news," replied Kitty, as she met his glance; and then her lips quivered, and she was silent.

"Has Mr. Woodhatch been sent for?" asked Greg.

"He has not left the hoose-place to-day," Mr. Larcom answered; "not stirred a foot from the farm."

"Where is he, then?" asked Greg anxiously.

"Oh! oopstairs with her. She will have no one else, see no one else, allow no human being to come witheen fifty yards of her," said Mr. Larcom tetchily; "not even a meenester of the Garspel, who would be of no small sarveece to her, posseebly, at such a time as this."

"Where are the doctors?" asked Greg, as if the idea had struck him suddenly that the doctors might be of more service to Miss Brake in the present emergency than Alec Larcom or John Woodhatch. But this was not in his thoughts, although the Methodist thought it was, and scowled at him from under his shaggy grey brows.

"They've gone!" cried Kitty; "oh! they have given her up—they can do no more. The only friend I have ever had is lost to me."

"Ye've lots of freends, garl," muttered Mr. Larcom; but Kitty shrugged her shoulders, as though that remark was open to question had she been disposed to argue with him. Greg meanwhile had sat down apart from the rest, with his face averted from them, and his gaze directed to the fireplace, where some paper-work from Kitty Vanch's deft fingers was displayed by way of summer decoration.

"Mr. Woodhatch has known Miss Brake a great many years, has he not?" Greg asked, after a short silence.

"A great many," answered Lucy.

"She will leave him all her money," said Greg Dorward, with a short, hard laugh, as

strangely out of place as his remark, which certainly staggered Mr. Larcom by its suddenness.

"Do ye theenk that, Greg? What's put that notion into yeer head?" he inquired. "Have ye heard anything about it?"

"I don't know anything," was the absent answer.

"John's reech enough without her money. And what he has, he does not make good use of," said Mr. Larcom: "he wastes an awful heap of it on people who don't deeserve it. He always did."

"He wastes it on the vile and criminal, you mean," replied Greg, half absently still, but with a ring of bitter satire in his words; "on those who reward his efforts for their good by sinking deeper into evil—who, for the blessing he would bring to them, give back a curse. Like Kitty and me!"

"No, no——" cried Kitty. She had risen, and was standing by the door, to which she had crossed when arrested by Greg's words. "That is not true. We bring no curse to him."

"Ay, but there's some truth in what Greg says," remarked Mr. Larcom, "and that is

what I eemplied in part—not meaning ye or Kitty, though. Gard forbeed.”

“We are the bright examples,” muttered Greg; “that is very evident.”

“I’m sure ye are,” said Mr. Larcom. “I was not theenking of either of ye two, don’t farncey it. I’m not quite a brute, Greg Darward.”

“I am glad to hear it.”

Mr. Larcom came to Greg’s side and put his big hand on his shoulder.

“What’s come to ye, Greg, to-day?” he asked; “ye are not aften like this.”

“I don’t know,” answered Greg more graciously; “I am tired and out of temper. Don’t mind me, Mr. Larcom.”

Kitty listened to his reply, and then went out of the room. Lucy looked from him to her father, but did not intrude upon their conversation.

“I have affended ye, Greg,” Mr. Larcom continued; “and though I say hard wards, I don’t go oot of my way to give any man affance. It is not the priveleege of my affice.”

“It shouldn’t be,” said Greg.

"It is not."

Greg stared harder than ever at Kitty's fire ornament, as he said—

"Whom were you thinking of, when you said Mr. Woodhatch wasted his money?"

"I was theenking of one or two who have gane away from here in John Woodhatch's time and mine," replied the parson.

"Were you thinking of Spikins for one?"

"No. Though he was not a good sparce-men, I take it."

"A man who died with a lie in his mouth, Fladge tells me," said Greg. "But, then, Fladge is a strange beast, too."

"He came here this afternoon. He has retoorned for good," commented Mr. Larcom.

"For good!" echoed Greg; "yes, he says so."

The door opened again, and he looked round with a start, as though his nerves *were* unstrung that evening. It was Kitty who re-entered, and to whom Lucy cried—

"How is she now? Will she see me?"

"Not yet," answered Kitty.

"Is Mr. Woodhatch with her still?" asked the parson.

"Yes; he is writing to her dictation, I think, and he reads at times to her what he has written," answered Kitty, whose face was very white and rigid, as though the near approach of death had scared her. Greg, looking keenly at her, saw this; Lucy and her father had only glanced in her direction.

"She's making anoother will," almost moaned Mr. Larcom; "and taking no one's adveece but John's; and a more unpractical man does not exeest on martal earth. Now, if——"

"Kitty, what is the matter?" exclaimed Lucy, springing up with a half-scream, as Kitty reeled slightly, and put her hand against the wall to save herself from falling.

"Nothing, nothing," answered the girl; "I shall be better in a minute. It is so close at hand!"

"It is our coommon inhereetance," muttered Mr. Larcom, repeating mechanically one of the stock phrases of his calling; "we have no need to be afraid of death."

The door opened again sharply, and once more Greg Dorward started and looked over his shoulder towards the new-comer, rather

than at the old sweetheart, who had been alarmed at the oncoming of God's messenger. This time it was Mrs. Chadderton who entered, with an addition to the tea equipage. She was at Kitty's side at once, and looking steadfastly into her face.

"You are not well, Miss Vanch," she said.

"No—yes, thank you; I shall be better in a minute," answered Kitty.

"You have been too constant in your attention to your mistress; you have worn yourself out," said Mrs. Chadderton; "and—and if you will allow me to say so——"

"I am very strong," answered Kitty.

"How is Miss Brake now?" asked the housekeeper.

"Worse. She is raving mad again!" said Kitty with a shudder.

"Poor lady! was she ever very sane, I wonder?" said Greg Dorward. "I should be glad to see her, if I might be permitted, at the last."

"God answers sharp and sudden on some prayers," a great writer has told us before this; and with a suddenness that was remarkable, a maidservant of the farm opened the door

immediately the words had escaped Greg, and said—

“If you please, Mr. Woodhatch wishes to know if Mr. Dorward has come back?”

“Did you not tell him?” asked Greg of Kitty.

“No,” was the slow reply.

“Yes, I am back, you see,” he said, spreading his hands before the fireplace, as though a fire was there and he was cold.

“Will you please to step upstairs, Mr. Dorward?”

“Upstairs?” said Greg, rising to his feet; “certainly. Does Mr. Woodhatch wish to see me?”

“Miss Brake wishes to see you, sir.”

“Indeed!”

He straightened himself as though cramped by sitting in one attitude so long, and looked from Alec Larcom to his daughter Lucy, thence to Mrs. Chadderton and her unacknowledged daughter Kitty, dwelling longest on the last face, as if endeavouring to read there something which was written for his behoof alone, unless the big, dark eyes deceived him very much. After this he went

steadily out of the room, and Kitty followed him, despite her new weakness, and a hand that had been suddenly put forth to restrain her by Mrs. Chadderton.

"Greg, Greg," she exclaimed in the corridor, and in an excited whisper, "don't go upstairs to-night!"

He stopped and looked hard into her face.

"Why do you ask me not to go?"

"For your own sake."

"I have seen women die before," he answered. "It is not the first time, Kitty, in our lives that we have seen the dead or dying. They went off pretty quickly at Bolter's Rents, didn't they?"

"Why do you speak of Bolter's Rents to-night?"

"I am so close to them," he answered.

"No, no; God forbid!"

"Very close," he added, as he moved on with Kitty's hold upon his arm.

"You *will* go, then?"

"Yes; what have I to fear?"

"Everything. Be on your guard, my poor Greg, for God's sake!"

Then Kitty left him—went with a rush and

a stifled cry away from him, and he looked after her in a stupefied way for an instant before resuming his progress upstairs. As the daylight fell upon him from the windows of the corridor, it seemed a sad face enough, with a new resolve upon it, which gathered strength with every step he took. He did not falter in any way, but went on steadily to the door of the sick-room. Here he knocked and waited, listening to the heavy footsteps of John Woodhatch crossing the room to admit him. The door opened, and the master of Farm Forlorn stood in the entry, looking as stern and grave as he who stood on the threshold for admittance.

"You sent for me, Mr. Woodhatch," said Greg.

"Miss Brake did—not I," answered Woodhatch; "you do not mind seeing her?"

"No. I have been saying downstairs that I should be glad to see her once more in this life."

"Come in, then."

John Woodhatch put out his strong hand and took Greg Dorward by the wrist, and, after closing the door behind him, led him into the

room like a little child who might not know his way, or who wanted guidance terribly, or who he fancied might break from him, and run shrieking from the house did he not hold him fast. Strange it was, the action—stranger still, that at that moment it should have reminded Greg of the old days when John Woodhatch brought him from the reformatory at Fretwell's into the sunshine beyond his prison school, and went with him to Farm Forlorn.

They crossed the room together, they faced a thin, ghastly figure, propped up by cushions in the bed—a woman with deep dark rings underneath her eyes, which were large and black and lustrous, and with the dread seal of coming death upon her.

“Hester, he has come.”

“I see,” she whispered back; “now ask him!”

“Now?”

“Yes—at once.”

“Greg,” said John Woodhatch, in a deep hoarse voice; “this poor dying woman charges you with the murder of her brother Morris. Is that true?”

CHAPTER XIX.

PARTING.

DESPITE the afternoon sun still shining in the room, the scene verged closely upon tragedy. The tall figure of the farmer, with his clear grey eyes fixed upon his favourite pupil ; Greg standing unmoved, and with his gaze directed towards the woman in the bed, who had brought this awful charge against him in her dying hours ; and the woman staring back at him, judge and accuser in one, and with no atom of belief in the innocence of him whom she accused.

“Is that true ?” John Woodhatch had asked, as if he had not put credence in her story ; and Greg Dorward answered, without a quaver in his voice—

“It is not true !”

It was remarkable, there was no response

in any way to his denial of the crime, only a solemn silence more embarrassing, more awful than any comment which at that time might have been made, or any loud-voiced disbelief of his assertion. They were both looking at him—that was all. The eyes of Hester Brake were difficult to confront for long; he looked away at last, turning to John Woodhatch, as it were, for an explanation.

“Who charges me?” he asked; “what has suggested such an accusation?”

“She has known it for some time, she says, **Greg.**”

“Is it possible you can think so, madam?” he asked, turning to Miss Brake again. “Have you considered the terrible position in which you place me? When your brother died I was a lad. I had been here only a day or two. I scarcely knew your brother.”

“But you killed him?”

He turned once more to John Woodhatch, and raised his shoulders slightly, as a Frenchman might have done.

“Can I reason with her, sir?” he said in a low voice; “is it worth while, poor lady, now?”

“Hardly.”

The answer came in a deep, sonorous voice; there was no ring of sympathy in it, no touch of feeling for Greg Dorward's position, accused of murder as he was by one sick and half-distraught, whose life had been a series of suspicions of her kind, and was dying out in the same miserable manner. Greg was surprised; he had looked for help, for confidence from the master, not for want of faith so soon.

“Miss Brake has been led away by some wild tale or other. Who is my accuser?” he asked. “Who has had a word to say against me, and hides behind so weak a woman as this?”

He spoke almost contemptuously of the frail figure at which he gazed again, and John Woodhatch answered for her.

“Spikins told her,” he said.

“And was Spikins a man to be believed? What did he know of me?”

“He was a man who had much to say about Morris Brake, at the last,” was John Woodhatch's reply.

“I would not have taken his word against the life of a sparrow,” answered Greg.

"Neither would I," replied the farmer.

"I knew you would not," exclaimed Greg.

"Without proof," added John Woodhatch.

"He has no proof of my connection with so horrible a deed, it is not likely; it is monstrous to consider it likely," Greg exclaimed, with new fervour.

Still John Woodhatch did not appear to be moved by Greg's declamation, although he did not betray in any way, unless by his grave, almost stoical demeanour, any actual doubt of Greg. He was in the chamber of the dying, and might think it better to moderate his words and looks in the presence of one passing away from the world. But he might have convinced her, by a little effort, thought Greg, of the improbability of the whole story, and of the indifferent character of him who had invented it.

"Tell him all," said the faint voice of Hester Brake.

"Not here. Not now," answered John Woodhatch; "it is too late to speak of it before you."

"He says he did not kill my brother," she murmured; "if after all I should have been deceived, John?"

"Then he will forgive you, I am sure. But I would be glad to hear you say, Hester, at the last," he answered, "that if he were even guilty you could forgive *him*. He was only a boy. There might have been a reason for it all; it might not have been even murder, judged by human error or temptation. Who knows, but God and this poor fellow here?"

His broad hand rested heavily on Greg Dorward's shoulder—so heavily that Greg shrank a little from it in his first surprise.

"Let him tell me the truth," she murmured, "and I may forgive even him."

"I have nothing to tell," answered Greg; "I did not murder your brother, I swear by the living God."

Again followed the solemn silence which had perplexed him at the beginning of the interview—the strange, steady looks towards him, with never a word of comfort to him to show his protests had affected his listeners, or were to be believed.

John Woodhatch spoke at last.

"That will do, Greg," he said. "Later on, in the night, we will talk of this again; you and I together."

"Very well. But——"

"But this suffering woman must depart in peace," he said. "The end is near, and time is precious with her."

John Woodhatch pointed to the door, and Greg Dorward bowed his head and walked slowly towards it. It had been a brief, strange interview, by which he had not profited—by which he was even bewildered. What did they know—what did they think they knew—to look at him with those great glassy eyes, in which no love for him, no hope for him, seemed for one instant to dwell? It was impossible they could say one word to tarnish the good name which he, by dint of honest perseverance, had earned at Skegs Shore. It was all a mistake.

As the door closed on him, Hester Brake looked towards John Woodhatch.

"So the miserable story ends, Hester," he said; "let us not speak of it again."

"But——"

"You promised me."

"Ah! well, I leave it in your hands," answered Hester, "knowing I can trust you."

"Leaving me to act as I please?" he asked.

"As you please—yes."

"I will do my best."

"Good friend. You always did, you always will," she murmured.

"Oh, I will not say as much as that. It is a long distance to the end of a man's promise, and I am not a hero," he said moodily.

"You will be always strong and just," she said with a sigh; "I am very sure of that. Where is Lucy Brake?"

"Do you wish to see her?" John Woodhatch inquired.

"Yes."

"I will fetch her to you."

"Thank you!" she replied; "I should like to see her for a little while. Not for long."

"No."

"And you will come back soon? You are not going to stop away from me at the last?" she said, half fretfully.

"I will return when you wish, Hester."

"In half an hour, then."

When he was at the door he paused again.

"You will not distress Lucy, or yourself, by further talk concerning Morris?" he said.

"Have I not said I leave the rest in your hands?"

"Yes."

"Trust me for a little while longer, John," she remarked; "I will not distress this Lucy of whom you think so much."

"She is a weak and excitable little woman," answered John. "Poor Lucy! it will be so much fresh misery for her, when the time comes to tell her the truth."

"After all, the decision is with her. Morris was her loss, more than mine. She will think it justice her husband's murder should be avenged."

"I am no avenger," muttered John Woodhatch; "and," he added, "I have not said I believe this story."

"The proofs are with you."

"They will be before the night closes."

"Ah! before the night closes," repeated Hester Brake.

John Woodhatch withdrew, and presently

Lucy stole into the room and took her place at the bedside. But Hester Brake was not conscious of her sister-in-law's presence ; she had fallen asleep the instant after John Woodhatch had quitted her, and though the sleep was restless and spasmodic, Lucy decided on not awakening her. It was better the sick woman should rest, she thought. Hester Brake opened her eyes some twenty minutes later, and regarded, almost with surprise, the young woman by her bedside. She had forgotten she had sent for her ; she only remembered that one old friend was missing from the room.

"Where is John ?" she asked, in a voice that was very weak.

"He is downstairs. You sent for me, he said."

"Kitty Vanch, is it ?"

"No—Lucy. I am Lucy ; don't you know me ?" asked the widow, bending more closely over her.

"Ah ! yes ; we haven't loved each other very much, have we ?"

"We have not understood each other ; that was all," was the reply.

“If I have been unjust to you in any way, I am very sorry.”

“Pray, do not think of me ; I was not just myself.”

“You will think of John Woodhatch presently. And love him if you can. And tell him some long day hence, Lucy,” she murmured, “that I—have loved him—all my wasted life, and he never, never thought of me ! ”

She closed her eyes with a heavy sigh, as though she were tired out, and would sleep again before John Woodhatch returned ; and Lucy did not attempt to continue the conversation. There was a dread upon her even that Hester Brake might seek to bind her by some promise at the last, and ill might come of that. She would be glad when John Woodhatch took his place here, as he had done for some mysterious reason all the day ; she was afraid of Hester Brake, and of all that might ensue before the parting hour.

But the hour had come already, and the parting had taken place between them. This poor, frail life—wasted it had not been, for

all Hester's sorrow over its fancied uselessness—had glided quietly and painlessly away; and Lucy did not know it was the last great sleep of all, until she looked at her again and saw God's seal upon the white, still face.

CHAPTER XX.

THE NIGHT WALK.

OVER the grief at Farm Forlorn, caused by the passing away of Hester Brake from the cares and troubles of daily life, we can afford to draw the veil. It is enough to state that there was real sorrow in the house of mourning, and many weeping for the loss of her. The strange woman had never secured much love for herself; only one had professed to love her, and to be grateful for her guidance; and, almost against her will, she had brought discord into the lives of those by whom she had been surrounded. She had meant all for the best; she had despised hypocrisy, and set herself to baffle it; she had been irritable, suspicious, jealous, and eccentric, by turns; but there were many in Farm Forlorn who

heard of her decease with wet eyes and quivering lips.

Kitty was in the dead woman's room, inconsolable.

"I have lost the one friend I ever had," she cried; and Mrs. Chadderton leaned over her and attempted solace vainly.

"God will send you another friend," said Mrs. Chadderton; "you must not grieve too much for her."

"If I had only seen her at the last; if they had not sent me from her; if I might have told her she was wrong in all her thoughts of Greg!" moaned Kitty to herself; "if I could have seen her once more; if she had only lived another day!"

Greg Dorward's thoughts were very different from these.

"If she had only died twenty-four hours earlier," said Greg moodily to John Woodhatch, when the news was brought to him that Hester Brake was dead, "it would have been so much the better."

"For you, or her?"

"For both of us," was the reply. "I should have esteemed her more, and she

would not have raked up a terrible story, and connected me with it."

"Shall we speak of it now?" asked Woodhatch calmly.

"Yes, surely," was the quick reply.

"Let us get out of the house," said the farmer; "there are too many listeners here. And time is precious to you."

Greg looked at his master, but said nothing. He was suspected, then, in earnest; this was no delusion, no wild dream of a wild woman. Even John Woodhatch believed what Hester Brake had told him. And yet how often had he spoken disparagingly of her and her ideas, setting down the trouble in his house at times, the difference between his friends, to her sole interference. He did not seem to think of this now, or to regard Hester Brake in any way save that of one whose word was an infallibility.

They passed out of the farmhouse together; it was dark night, with the sky sown thick with stars. John Woodhatch looked up at them for a moment, as if marvelling at their beauty, and then master and pupil were on the high-road together.

At a short distance from the farm there was a figure waiting for them—a shadowy, ungainly figure, who, it was evident, was expecting them to come that way.

“Who is this?” asked Greg suspiciously.

“It is Reuben Fladge,” answered John Woodhatch; “he has been waiting for me.”

It was on Greg’s lips to ask a second question, but for some unaccountable reason he refrained. It was as well not to appear too curious, or too suspicious.

Reuben Fladge slouched towards them, with his head bent down, and his hands thrust to the bottoms of his pockets. The news had reached him, too, of Miss Brake’s death.

“So she’s off, sir,” he said, when they were all three together on the high-road.

“Yes, Fladge; she is gone.”

“She was a friend to me. And,” he added, “I’m awful sorry. It’s one good un gone; isn’t it, Mr. Woodhatch?”

“It is.”

“And the good are precious scarce,” said Fladge, quite philosophically. “A dozen or

two like me might go, and nobody the wiser or the sorrier; but one like her is missed."

"Yes, Fladge, the good are precious scarce," repeated John Woodhatch ironically.

"When's the funeral?"

"The funeral?"

"It'll be a fine un, I hope," said Fladge. "There should be a rare fuss over her—ho, ho!—if I had anythink to do with it."

"She is not in her coffin yet," answered the master moodily; "and we are not in a hurry to think of her grave."

They walked on slowly for a few paces, side by side; Greg Dorward, the man under suspicion, wondering at the other two. Suddenly John Woodhatch stopped again, and Greg stopped with him; Fladge plodding slowly in advance.

"Greg," said Woodhatch, "you say it is all false, and you have been wrongfully accused?"

"I do."

They went on again. When they had overtaken Fladge, John Woodhatch said to him, "Do you remember my instructions?"

"Every word on 'em, master; to be sure."

"Then go."

Reuben Fladge touched his cap, and with long, awkward strides went away down the road, and was quickly lost in the darkness. The tramp of his receding footsteps was heard for a few moments after he had disappeared, and it seemed to Greg's quick ears that presently he was running.

Greg Dorward did not ask for an explanation of this movement, and affected not to be interested by it, or to connect it with the charge of murder which had been made against him. He felt it was all part of the new and lurid light in which he stood, however; that in some way or other a chance had been offered him, and he had let it pass, as a chance of atonement, or confession, might have been offered to a guilty man.

John Woodhatch explained for himself that this was so; and yet his explanation was more of a mystery than ever.

"I can trust Fladge," he said; "and strange it is that poor silly fellow is the only one whom I can rely—on whom we both can rely," he added.

"Why should I rely on him?" asked Greg; "in what way does he affect me?"

"Not at all, I hope. Your being innocent makes all things clear and straight. Your being innocent," he continued—"why, there can possibly come no harm of this. Otherwise——"

"Otherwise," repeated Greg, in a low voice.

"Otherwise it may be—destruction!"

Greg did not reply. The mysterious nature of the forces opposing him, working against him, was beyond his power to fathom; and he could not confront that which, at present, was concealed from him. He was at war with the dead, not with the living, and he could not confront *them*. The old man, Spikins, in the churchyard, the woman, still and cold at Farm Forlorn, were the enemies of his peace, and he knew not what they had said in their lifetimes, or why John Woodhatch should put his trust in them, and keep it from himself.

He had not long to speculate on this.

"We will walk by the sea, Greg," said Woodhatch, "where there will be no one to surprise us."

"I am quite ready, sir."

But it was John Woodhatch who was surprised at Greg Dorward's coolness—his im-

perturbability. Nothing shook the nerves of the young man, who was prepared for any revelation. Surely this was conscious innocence, thought Woodhatch, and all was not deceit and bravado.

They struck off from the high-road by the sandy path well known to both of them, as a short cut to the sea. They did not exchange another word till the dark sands were beneath their feet, and the wind was moaning across the sea at them; where, in the distance, the restless, white-crested waves seemed rising up, like ghosts, to look at them, and wonder what their errand was at that hour. They might be speaking in hoarse murmurs of them, too, and passing the news on, mile by mile, along the shore, and dashing with it against the Yorkshire rocks many miles away!

They turned in the direction of Skegs Shore, where the village was where Morris Brake was murdered, and the grey, stone church where Greg was to have been married, and the silent churchyard where the man struck from life lay sleeping—"unavenged," as Hester Brake considered it; where Lucy had lived, whom these two men both had

loved, and loved strangely, considering her past and their own.

"This way?" said Greg. "Would it not be better to take the coast towards Blea-thorpe? No one would meet us in that direction."

"Does it matter?"

"Not at all."

"Then we will go this way, where the truth will meet us," replied the farmer.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CRISIS.

SIDE by side, and silently for awhile, went master and pupil, with God's stars shining down upon them. All was very desolate and dark ; only those familiar with this long stretch of sand could have found their way upon it, or been at all at ease there. The higher sandy ridge, which at daytime marked the line of coast, was completely lost in the blackness of the night, and presently the breaking of the waves upon the shore only denoted where the sea was. All was one wide stretch of desolation, which grew blacker and denser as they advanced.

Here they could speak without fear of listeners. Here hardly a Lincolnshire man would trust himself on such a night as this. Smuggling had gone out of fashion, and the

wind came with icy coldness across the water, and moaned piteously after sundown, as though the night was scaring it.

"There isn't a great deal to tell you, Greg, and you may answer or not, as it seems better for you," commenced John Woodhatch. "To me it is at present so like truth, it would be, if false, a lie so unnecessary and base, that I am daunted for the first time in my life. And, Greg, I am verily afraid for you, as for a son whom I have loved—whom for his good fight upwards I have honoured until now."

Greg's lips moved twice before he could reply, but it was too dark to see this. Then the answer came in six short words.

"I thank you for that honour," rang out in such sad, tremulous tones that the listener was startled.

"It was Spikins who told Miss Brake what he considered was the truth of Morris's murder. That you know already."

"He told it for money, doubtless. What would he have not done for money?" asked Greg, in his usual tones.

"He was not a man whose bare word was to be trusted; all his life he was untrust-

worthy, though, probably, after his fashion, faithful to me," said Woodhatch. "I did not look for virtues in him, knowing what he had been; and I had begun with him too late. But it is always too late with me," he added, "and I have not been a lucky man, whatever they may say in Lincolnshire."

"Well, well, sir," asked Greg, a little impatiently, "what did Spikins tell Miss Brake?"

"That you were at Skegs Shore—down by the church—and hiding in the porch on the night when Morris was with his young wife at the parson's house. Spikins had been at the Swan all the evening, and coming out had caught a glimpse of you, and had resolved to watch you, as you were watching some one else. Is that true?"

"That I was in the village late at night?"

"Yes."

"It is not true," answered Greg; "the old man has invented this."

"He had been watching the farm for many nights for that matter. Mrs. Chadderton had set him to watch, having misgivings that all was not fair play about us. But this night,"

said John Woodhatch, "he had left his trust, and gone to the village to drink."

"This is a drunken man's testimony, then," said Greg very scornfully.

"Whether he was drunk or not, I cannot say; he said he was sober. You waited until the village lights were out, and then you went on to Larcom's, where you knew Morris was. There you waited again, and then——"

"And then?" echoed Greg.

"And then Morris came forth, and there was a sudden and awful struggle between you, and Morris Brake was left dead upon the road."

"It is a mad story," said Greg in a suppressed tone. "Why should I have wanted to kill Lucy Brake's husband? What was he to me?"

"He had done you an injury, it may be, and you were revengeful; or he had discovered you were watching him, and struck you, and in your rage you struck back and killed him. That seems the story to me. God knows if I read it aright. I am not a far-seeing man," he added; "I have no knowledge of human character; I am no wiser than a child."

"How could I have killed him?" asked Greg; "he was a giant in strength to me."

"You carried in your hands a steel spud, which has been missing from the night of the murder," continued Woodhatch. "It was mine. Mrs. Chadderton knew it was gone, and in fear of me, as though I was the murderer, said not a word to any living soul. It was evidence which might have hanged me had it been discovered, and it was branded with my name."

"Well?"

"You might have hidden that more for my sake than your own, Greg Dorward. Heaven knows whether you were anxious to spare me from false evidence, or only wished to save yourself. I cannot guess your thoughts," he continued, "but you hid the weapon which took Morris's life, and your cap also, which, stained with blood, had fallen into the roadway where he lay stiff and stark."

Was it fancy, or did Greg Dorward cower at this? The darkness was so thick about them both, it was difficult to say. But there came no response from Greg, and it sounded as if his breath was short and thick—as though

the pace at which they had been striding was almost too much for him.

"Shall I go on?" asked Woodhatch.

"Yes," was the reply, "if there is more to tell."

"There is more."

"I listen," responded Greg.

"That steel spud you buried, and your cap also, and Spikins saw you do it, and told Miss Brake where she could find them for herself," said Woodhatch. "It was the new reformatory cap, which was lost a few days after you had come to the farm, if you remember."

"And I buried them, you say. Where?"

John Woodhatch took him by the arm, and pointed across the murky waste of sea-sand.

"Where that light is. Can you see it burning?"

"A light upon the sands?" asked Greg.

"Yes, this way. Standing where I stand, you can see it in the distance."

Greg took his master's place and looked for himself.

Yes, a light was shining a few hundred yards away, amongst the timbers of the ship which had been wrecked upon the coast many

years ago, and left its skeleton as testimony of disaster.

“Who is there?” asked Greg breathlessly.

“Reuben Fladge.”

“What is he doing? Searching for those things?”

“Yes.”

“Does he know for what purpose?”

“No. But I must tell him, Greg, in my defence and his; for he too, poor fellow, was made the scapegoat of this crime. Unless——”

“Unless what?” asked Greg.

“Unless you trust in me to hear the truth, and—keep your secret still,” answered John Woodhatch sternly; “unless you tell me all at once.”

Greg Dorward was strangely silent, and they walked on towards the light, shining now across the sands, the beacon to guide their steps towards it.

Suddenly Greg stopped and crossed his hands together—clutched them together passionately and looked down.

“Yes, I can trust you, master,” he cried; “and, God help me, I killed him!”

"God help you indeed, my poor, weak, miserable Greg, with this man's death upon your conscience all these years!" said Woodhatch solemnly.

He had expected the avowal; he had been waiting for it; but none the less it came upon him with a crushing force—a truth that, with its weight of horror, nearly bore him down.

"Ah! sir, I am not so bad as you may think," cried Greg, speaking quickly and earnestly. "I am not so great a villain, not his murderer in cold blood, as you have fancied, although his death is on my soul, and he haunts me night after night; a something that does not rest in Skegs Shore churchyard, and will not let me be. I did follow him—I was curious; I had been listening to your quarrel with him; and, when he went away, I followed almost without motive, save to know where he was going. When he came from Mr. Larcom's house he saw me, and rushed at me for a spy; he struck me, kicked me, shook me like a rat; and, when he let me go, I killed him with the spud I had brought away for my protection. But I did not mean to kill him—I did not know what I was doing;

and at the first blow he dropped down dead. What could have been expected of a wretch like me, save murder? I was incorrigible from the first. You should have left me where I was, sir; I was fit for nothing better. I was from the streets and the prison; my father and mother were bad, and I had never known what good was."

"Yes, yes," said Woodhatch in reply; "I know. Your life might have been mine, your sin might have been mine; you are the shadow of myself even in this; for I would have killed your father, and even hoped I had killed him. Why should I be your judge—your accuser?"

"Ah! you were always generous," cried Greg; "and you—you will not say a word against me? I have repented years ago—I have suffered. It was his death, after all, which has made my life a different and better one. 'I will atone for this,' I said, 'until the end of my days.'"

"Atonement comes late; and you would have kept this crime concealed, or let any poor soul suffer in your stead, so that you were safe," said John Woodhatch. "No, you are no hero, no penitent; only a coward, who

has acted like a coward through it all. What will you do?"

"I cannot say."

"It is not safe to remain here, and I would not have you at my right hand, if it were."

"No," answered Greg.

"What may ooze out from this day, what may have already escaped, God knows, for there are spies about the place. But I will not put a rope round the neck of one who has shared my home, my trust. You must go; you must disappear at once. And Lucy Brake must know the truth of this, when you are safe away."

"Yes—good God! yes," said Greg, "she must."

"To-morrow you will get away, ostensibly on business. In your place I would go abroad, and by repentance, honest industry, try to make atonement for an awful past. Money shall not be wanting."

"I have some. I—I cannot take any more from you."

"We will talk of this to-morrow. Now let me go on alone to Reuben Fladge," he

said; "you will not care to come with me further."

"No, sir."

"Very well."

John Woodhatch walked on, leaving Greg Dorward looking after him—a silent, motionless figure on the sands, a man struck, as it were, into stone by the grim truth which had come to him and unmasked him. But when the master had gone a few yards, Greg was at his side again with a mad, quick plunge, and a cry as of a wounded animal. He seized the master's right hand in both of his, and held it very tightly.

"If I see you no more—if I know you no more from this night—God bless you for your mercy, Mr. Woodhatch. I am grateful. I—Greg!"

Then he relinquished his grip, and was gone. He had vanished away in the darkness, leaving no trace.

John Woodhatch called to him, but there was no reply; then he walked on again towards the old dead ship, and passed through its twisted oaken ribs into the sand-drift within, and where the lantern light was glowing.

Where was Reuben Fladge, too, with the sand heaped high about him, standing knee-deep in a trench which he had dug ; and in his hands were a long steel spud and the fragments of a boy's blue cap.

“ Here they be, sir,” he said, as John Woodhatch came towards him.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RETURN TO THE FARM.

It was a weird picture, worthy of a painter's pencil in that hour : the rugged, uncouth man with the red light upon his face, stooping and examining the things he had unearthed, and holding them close to the old lantern for that purpose ; the tall figure of the farmer watching him ; the gaunt ribs of the wreck rising above them like grim, unshapely witnesses ; the dark night closing them in, and the bright stars, like eyes of fire, looking down upon them.

"Bury them again, Fladge," said John Woodhatch ; "they are better where they are."

Fladge looked up, surprised and discomfited.

"Why, what was the use——"

"Put them back," said Woodhatch gruffly.

“ I was curious to know they were there, that was all.”

“ It’s your spade,” cried Fladge, “ with the name burnt into the handle ; I recollect—— ”

“ Recollect nothing, and say nothing,” interrupted Woodhatch sternly.

“ Where’s Greg ? ” asked Fladge, as if even his slow comprehension had connected his task with that of the young man whom he had seen last with the master.

“ Gone back.”

“ Oh.”

Fladge asked no more questions ; he was content to do the farmer’s bidding, to betray no further curiosity, to forget even the task which had been set him, if he could. John Woodhatch watched him as he shovelled back the sand into its place, and when the task was finished, it was only Reuben Fladge’s half-whoop of exultation that aroused him from the train of thought into which he had fallen.

He had been wondering how it would end, and what would become of Greg Dorward ? What he should do with him, and in what way he could be of service to him, bad as Greg was, desperately as he had struggled to

keep his secret from him, and proclaim himself above reproach. What was to be done with this new and awful failure—this young fellow with the hangman's rope about his neck and the sin of murder on his soul? He, John Woodhatch, could not betray him—would not betray him; he had shared his home with Greg, he had plotted and planned for his advancement, he had placed implicit trust in him, and it was not the hand of the master which should shut every ray of light away. He had had such thoughts as these when he had told Hester Brake he was not the avenger of her brother's death, when the thought had come awfully close to him that Greg had struck that brother down. Of late days he had taken this Greg Dorward to his heart; there were traits of character in Greg which had won upon him strangely, and the youth's aptitude in learning, his energy for work, his respect for him, his love of a son for him almost, had all drawn a lonely man's heartstrings more closely round him than John Woodhatch had guessed until this terrible discovery.

He did not think of Morris Brake deeply, or

of the justice which should stand first before all thought of others. It was himself, in Greg's place, which he sketched in lurid colours, and it was Greg's safety which, in his heart, he was considering. He could make allowance for the wild, desperate nature of the boy whom he had tried to save; he had brought him down to Lincolnshire marked "dangerous;" he had received him from Fretwell's hands with many a warning of the risk he ran, and this was the awful yet natural outcome of it. This was the very end of it, he thought.

"Are you ready, Fladge?" he asked; "we will go home together, if you are."

"All right, master," answered Fladge. "And where did you say was Master Greg?"

"Gone back."

"Ah!—yes."

John Woodhatch and Fladge went their way over the sands, but at a slower pace than Greg and the master had adopted in coming to the village of Skegs Shore. There were leaden weights to the farmer's feet now, and he lingered by the way. He wanted time to think, and this great dark space to think in;

there was so much to prepare and be fore-armed against, and his ideas would not fall into marching order as they were wont to do. Yes, his chief thought was how to save Greg Dorward from the consequences of his crime ; not how to bring a murderer to justice. Wrong in the sight of Heaven, very likely, he thought, with his hands clenched and his brow knit in his agony of meditation ; but he must save the lad, at any risk. Let him have one more chance, if possible, and away from Farm Forlorn. Greg had striven hard, and by much duplicity, to conceal his crime ; but the stake he had played for was his life, and John Woodhatch would not condemn him without mercy. Let others do that, not he. He was neither judge nor executioner.

He passed into the farmhouse with the same perplexed expression on his face, and those within thought it was the death of Hester Brake which had cast so deep a shadow on him. They could not guess he had almost forgotten that night she was dead—that she had ever lived—in the trouble which her dying words had brought to him.

Lucy was sitting at the table listening to

her father's reading from the Bible, and Parson Larcom was reading very intently and in a loud voice. In the background stood Mrs. Chadderton, hardly an attentive listener, and fidgeting with the keys hanging at her waist. Mr. Larcom had sent for her, as an especial mark of his favour on a solemn and memorable occasion, and also for Kitty, who, however, had not put in an appearance, but had returned a hasty message that she was ill, and could not come.

John Woodhatch entered brusquely, and with but scant measure of respect for Mr. Larcom's Bible-reading, he said—

“Where's Greg?”

Mrs. Chadderton answered for the assembled company, and just as the preacher had begun another verse.

“He has not been seen since he left the house with you, sir. But he may have gone to his room.”

“Very likely. Send some one to see.”

“Yes, sir.”

The housekeeper not unwillingly withdrew, and Mr. Larcom closed his Bible with a bang.

"I'm theenking ye might have waited, John, till I had feenished."

"There is no guessing when you are going to finish, Alec," said Woodhatch; "but go on."

"Not with people tramping in and out, and sending massages, and nobody paying the least attention to the blessed Garspel—why should I waste my breath?" said Mr. Larcom.

"Ah!—yes—exactly," replied John Woodhatch absently; then he crossed his arms and fell into a fresh train of thought until Mrs. Chadderton returned.

"Mr. Dorward has not come back, sir," she announced.

"He is busy, I know. He has much to do," said John Woodhatch. "What time is it?"

"Ten o'clock," was the reply.

"Ah! yes—quite early. Should he return before you lock up for the night, Mrs. Chadderton, tell him I am sitting in this room, waiting for him," he added.

"Yes, sir."

Mrs. Chadderton withdrew once more, and

Mr. Larcom began quietly to fill his long clay pipe, and to stare meanwhile at his host.

"Are ye going to seet up, John?" he asked.

"A little later than usual, perhaps," was the reply.

"Ah! I'll keep ye coompany, then."

"I don't require any company. I fancy I am best alone to-night," he answered.

Alec Larcom did not take the hint, if it were a hint, that was conveyed in this absent fashion. He lighted his pipe carefully, puffed out the smoke, and regarded John Woodhatch with keen scrutiny. Lucy had already risen, seeing more clearly that the farmer wished to be alone.

"I am going up to Kitty. If I should not return again, good night, John," she said.

"Good night, Lucy."

"You must not grieve too much for your loss," she said as she shook hands with him.

"I am not grieving," he replied. "I don't know, Lucy, if I am not envying her; she is past all cares and disappointments."

"Yes," answered Lucy, "that is true."

She kissed her father and went away and Parson Larcom drew a chair to the hearthrug, sat down, and faced his friend.

"It's coold enough for a fire to-night," he said.

"I am warm. And it's late," was the reply.

"Oh, I don't want a fire! John. I was only theenking it was coold for the end of August," he remarked; "but then these are coold, sad times for all of us."

"Yes."

John Woodhatch did not speak further for a considerable period; would not have spoken again, perhaps, had not his friend once more attracted his attention.

"Ye take this to heart too much, John, as ye take everything for that matter. That's ye'er failing," said Mr. Larcom; "and, after all, as ye imply, she's better off. It was a warld of much pain and many tiresome fancies to her, poor soul."

"Yes."

"And I'm theenking, John, we should be a trifle warmer with a little whaskey."

"It shall be sent up to your room."

"Ay, when I go then. It wouldn't be quite

freely leaving you here all alone," observed the parson.

"I shall be glad to be alone to-night," was the frank admission; "I am not fit company for any living soul."

"Is there not the will to read?" said Mr. Larcom, after a preliminary cough.

"What will?"

"Miss Brake's, to be sure. Why, it's very dazed ye seem, John!" replied the Methodist.

"Let the will rest. I am not curious about it."

"Ay, but I am," exclaimed Mr. Larcom, "being related to her by marriage, as it were; and being dootful if it's a senseable or Chreestian-like document, John, knowing how eccentric a body she was."

"No matter what she was," muttered the farmer.

"Ye don't think of looking at the will to-night, then?"

"No."

"There may be notions in it as to her funeral," suggested Mr. Larcom; "it's a foolish coostom to defer arpening people's wills, and so burying folk sometimes clean cantrary

to instructions. Haven't ye known that more than once, John, to occur?"

"The instructions as to her funeral I took down this day in writing, and at her request," said Woodhatch. "They are very simple. And after the funeral, her will is to be read, she adds."

"Grawcious; and why couldn't ye say as much before, instead of keeping me out of my lawful rest?" exclaimed Mr. Larcom. "I'll bid ye a good night, John."

"Good night," was the deep-voiced response.

"It's been an uncoomfortable day for us all; but it's the common lot, ye know as well as most men."

"Yes."

"And why ye should be so dasparately upset aboot it, I don't see, unless something else has harppened," he said shrewdly.

"Good night, old Alec," replied John Woodhatch; "don't trouble yourself about me in any way. Every man has his dark hour—the hour when he is better by himself."

"Ay—yes."

Mr. Larcom departed, and was heard the instant afterwards in the corridor giving elabo-

rate instructions about his whiskey before he went upstairs to his room.

John Woodhatch listened to Mr. Larcom's distant voice and his receding footsteps on the brass-bound stairs, as if to make sure the Methodist was departing for the night; and, when all was still, he took from his pockets the papers which he had been writing out that day, and looked them over carefully. Mrs. Chadderton came in, retired again after his steady stare at her, closed the door sharply behind her, re-opened it, and returned swiftly to his side.

"Greg has not come back," she said.

"I know it. He would have been with me else. When he——"

"He will never return, sir."

"Ha! Who says that? What makes you think that?"

"He has written a line to Kitty," she replied; "she will come to you presently, if you will wait for her—when the house is still. Console her, sir, if you can; pray, do!"

And then Mrs. Chadderton vanished away again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN THE HOUSE WAS STILL.

JOHN WOODHATCH waited very patiently for the arrival of Kitty Vanch. He sat almost like a statue in his chair, looking far ahead of him at the possibilities of life, tracing on the downhill road the figure of the boy, whom he had seen first at Fretwell's, coming from the darkness to the light. And now from light to darkness back again!

The master of Farm Forlorn did not adopt his old habit of pacing the full limits of the room; he had not the energy of thought that night to keep him moving; he was as one very weary, even utterly disheartened.

The house *was* still, but Kitty Vanch was long in coming to him. It was still as the grave within—as the dead woman above stairs; only the far-off moaning of the wind

across the sea and fen-land was heard beyond the farm, like a wail over the lost cause, the last failure of the man who had tried to do too much.

He sat with some papers in his hands still ; those relating strictly to the affairs of Hester Brake he had thrust into his pocket ; those relating to Greg Dorward, to Hester Brake's written history of how she had tracked the crime out, were still within his hands, clutched tightly, as if in fear of losing them. He had read them over and over again ; he had committed them to memory against his will, but the facts were corrosive and burned themselves in ; *he* should never forget them, and he did not care for any one else to hear of them, much less remember them.

Presently the door opened noiselessly, and Kitty Vanch crept in, looking more like a ghost than Kitty Vanch ; so white and solemn a face was it in that hour of their meeting.

" Well, Kitty," he said, in almost his old tones, " what has kept you up so late to-night ? And why are you anxious to see me ? "

" Oh, you know, sir ! " answered Kitty at once, " you know too well."

“What do I know?”

He was on his guard to the last. It might be that Kitty knew not anything of what had actually happened, and Greg had told her nothing which could account truly for his departure. It would be like Greg—it would be wise.

“You know Greg has gone away,” she exclaimed, dropping into the chair facing him, and looking as tired and weary as himself, “and that it is for ever.”

“He has not come back—but I have been expecting him.”

“You have?” she asked, regarding him incredulously.

“Yes.”

“Read that.”

She opened her hand, in which had been crumpled a scrap of paper, and John Woodhatch took it from her, smoothed it out, and read these hastily scrawled pencil lines :

“*Skegs Shore Railway Station,*

“*August 27, 18—.*

“*I am leaving for London at once. The master will tell you all. Good-bye.*”

There was no signature, and it was not addressed to Kitty Vanch, but it was in Greg's handwriting unmistakably.

"How did you get this?"

"I found it on the dressing-table of my room," said Kitty; "Greg had climbed up from the outside, I think, and put it there."

"Very likely," answered John Woodhatch, returning it to her.

"You are not surprised," said Kitty.

"No. I am not surprised," was the reply, "I thought he would go away—if not to-night."

"And—why?" asked Kitty.

"It is important he should go to London. Business——"

Kitty leaned forward and laid her hand upon his arm.

"I will not deceive you, sir, and I don't want you to try and deceive me. I know everything."

"What do you know, my poor Kitty?" asked John Woodhatch. To the last he would not betray this poor shred of a secret which was left. He seemed to hold to it jealously, as though it was his own—as though

his interest in screening a criminal from justice was far greater than his doctrine of atonement. He would acknowledge nothing, do nothing, for Greg Dorward's sake. He had been proud of Greg till this hour.

"I know Miss Brake charged him with the murder of her brother. And you wrote down all she said this afternoon," said Kitty.

"Do you think it is true?"

"Yes," answered Kitty, "Greg does not deny it."

"And I was to tell you all, he said?"

"Yes," repeated Kitty once more, "if you will. See, I am quite prepared. Very strong, sir, to hear any bad news—and to meet any bad news."

"It has been a terrible day—and it closes terribly," said John Woodhatch, "but to you, girl, it should be a bright beginning."

"Why?" cried Kitty, with her eyes ablaze now.

"This is an escape for you," was the answer; "he might have been your husband, and the truth might have come years hence when you could not get from it."

"Oh, if it had been!" exclaimed Kitty,

"then I should have been with him—shared his trials—fought his battles—kept him strong. If it had only happened later on, at any cost to me."

"You were fond of him?" inquired Woodhatch; "you did not leave him because you had forgotten how to love him?"

"He was everything to me then," said Kitty, "he is everything now."

"He killed Morris Brake," came the solemn answer back.

"God forgive him—yes, that may be," cried Kitty; "but it must have been in self-defence, after some insult, or blow. It was not murder, I am sure."

This was the echo of Greg's own hurried explanation of the crime, told on the dark sands with the stars for witnesses, thought John Woodhatch. And it was very near the truth.

"Still, he killed Morris," said the farmer thoughtfully; "and the law will not forgive him."

"It was five years ago, when he was only a lad—a wild, desperate boy, who had seen you for a day or two, not longer, and was

afraid of you," she cried. "He never had his chance, sir; the evil met him here at once, and mastered him—he was always passionate and violent and mad—he would only listen to me—he had never known what good was, what God was, and at the Reformatory he had only met with hard masters and hard words. He *had* no chance—he never had a chance until it was too late. Don't think too cruelly of him, Mr. Woodhatch—for mercy's sake don't turn against him now and set them all in search of him. Think what you were yourself—what might have become of you! Don't hang this poor sinner, who has shared your home and life—don't think of the Law! Think how he loved you and looked up to you as his model, always. As he did, he did, he did!"

She was kneeling at his feet. It was with difficulty that he roused her from her suppliant posture.

"My poor Kitty, I do not need your intercession for him. I shall not stir one step in this," he said, "the Hands of Justice I might try to drag him from—never to thrust him into."

"God bless you!" murmured Kitty.

"It is not justice," he added; "but then, I am not a just man. She should have told Alec Larcom, had she wanted justice!"

"Did she wish him hanged, sir?" asked Kitty in a terrified whisper.

"No. She left it to me to act. She had forgotten what I had been in my time, or what Greg Dorward had become to me. And I act thus, Kitty."

He walked to the lamp, and held the papers over the flames, Kitty watching, with her hands pressed upon her heart.

"That is the story—of it all?" she gasped forth.

"Yes—and thus it ends," he said.

Together they watched the papers consume and shrivel away to scraps of tinder which fell upon the table-cover, and the fire of which, left in them, was extinguished by the broad, hard hand of the master. Kitty stole to the door and looked out, listened, and came back again.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed, when John Woodhatch had completed his task.

"And now," he said, "what next?"

"Ah! what next. We must wait till we hear from him again, as I am sure we shall," said Kitty.

"As I am sure we shall not," answered Woodhatch, "and as it is best we should not."

"I pray we may—and soon," cried Kitty.

"No—no. He must pass away from your life as from mine," said John Woodhatch. "He has deceived us all—and there's an end of him."

"No."

"We have spared him, but he is unworthy of us. He belongs not to us ever again. Try and think that," said Mr. Woodhatch.

"He belongs to me to the end, sir," murmured Kitty. She stooped and kissed his hand, in gratitude and reverence, and then went silently from the room.

John Woodhatch did not follow her. He sat down in his old place, and thought it all over once more.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“GOD SPEED.”

No—this was not the end of it. Let him talk as he would, plan as he might, the end of all interest in Greg Dorward, and of Greg Dorward's life, had not come to pass, simply because he had pronounced it so. He would have deceived Kitty Vanch into this belief, he was trying hard, but vainly, to deceive himself with it, but the boy from Fretwell's remained foremost in his thoughts. What had become of him? In the future, what would become of him? Would the firm, persistent, calculating character of Greg stand him in good stead now, set apart from all his friends, and beginning life afresh without them all? Could he forget them easily and start again without much thought concerning them? Would he be callous or sorry? Was he

devoid of feeling, or possessed of a deeper feeling than any one had imagined? What was the natural character of such a man as he, who for five years had so completely baffled them, who, from his youth upwards, had played so terrible a part, and with never an one the wiser, save old Spikins? Might there not be truth—had it not the clear ring of truth about it?—in the statement made upon the sands that it was the death of Morris Brake which had altered Greg's life for the better? A horrible moral, but surely a grim truth in it. John Woodhatch understood this, if no one else did. A better, stronger life had followed the murder at Skegs Shore—a something like repentance, perhaps, who could tell?

“I will atone for this till the end of my days!” That had been Greg Dorward's motto—he had owned to it, and John Woodhatch, with a clearer light upon the case, could see in what way it had shaped Greg's career. It had not made Greg a sad, or a religious man—it had not troubled him so very much, this crime. Years hence he would have learned almost to forget it, to set it so

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much apart from the current of his life, as to regard it as a something appertaining to a past which was scarcely his own.

The days seemed to drag on painfully enough at Farm Forlorn; everybody appeared to have dropped into the old, waiting, expectant attitude, and no one would have guessed the storm had already broken forth, by the calm figures flitting about the house.

On the coming Wednesday Miss Brake would be buried in Skegs Shore churchyard with her brother, and till that day let the dead rest—the dead woman and her wishes, the dead hopes of more than hers, the dead, dry promises of many things which had had their birth under the old roof tree.

John Woodhatch would not disturb at present the false peace of the farm; he would say nothing to Lucy concerning the discovery of her husband's murderer; after the funeral he would tell her the whole story, and beg her to forgive Greg, as Greg truly penitent craved to be forgiven by her whose life his mad act had shadowed. And, reasoned John Woodhatch, supposing Lucy, this obdurate Lucy and her father, looked very naturally at the

facts in a different and sterner light, and craved for vengeance, or justice which might be akin to vengeance, why Greg would have had time to get away!

Always that strange wish at the bottom of his heart—to secure the safety of Greg Dorward, the boy he had brought up, the man whose career he had shaped out, and who had shown such promise. God desert him in his hour of need, if this young life should end at the gallow's foot, thought Woodhatch. That should not be the end of it, after all his efforts. He swore that, with a heavy frown upon his face and his big hands clenched together—"he was deserving of more reward than that," he exclaimed defiantly, and even profanely, he was the scapegoat of it all, and life was as unprofitable to him now, as was the moral wreckage which misfortune had cast at its feet.

If it were not for Kitty Vanch, he should lose all hope in human kind, he thought, at this disturbed epoch of his life—he should disbelieve in the possibility of doing good, of altering human character, of sowing on the barren rock and seeing the result in fair green blades of promise; he should believe only in

grim Fate, and hereditary instincts, of the power of darkness to bring forth darkness after its kind, but nothing brighter or better, or with a single gleam of God's light on it ever.

No one appeared interested or surprised at Gregory Dorward's sudden absence from the farm; the plea of business in town had been accepted by Lucy and her father as a matter of course, and there were many matters occupying the minds of the minister and his daughter just then. It seemed that John Woodhatch and Kitty bore the brunt of it all, with the shadowy figure of Mrs. Chadderton watching them with keen interest from the background of her silent life, an important factor to be accounted for when least expected by these two.

John Woodhatch was a very early riser, we know, but on coming down on the Monday morning he was surprised to find Kitty dressed and waiting for him—dressed as if for a journey, and with a deep black veil thrown back from her sad young face.

"What is it now?" he asked harshly, a man irritated by surprises. "Why are you masquerading in this way, Kitty?"

"I am going away," she answered very calmly.

"Going away," he repeated; "and directly? Going from me?"

"Yes."

"Where are you going?"

"To find Greg."

John Woodhatch's broad brow contracted at this answer; he had not bargained for Kitty's acting in any way contrary to the wishes he had already expressed. Greg had been screened, had been assisted to escape; but, there was an end to him, for all that. He had said so!—and now this slight, fragile woman faced him with a determination contrary to his, and opposed to him in every particular.

"You cannot find him," he muttered; "and it would be madness, if you could."

"I will make the trial. I am quite resolved, sir," she said firmly; "and I am very, very sorry if you wish me to remain. But go I must!"

"There is no reason for haste, or foolish mystery," exclaimed Woodhatch; "you only attract suspicion by acting in this manner. You know that."

"Yes; but how is it to be helped?"

"By appearing for a time more like yourself," he replied; "by waiting patiently, by—— Kitty," he cried in a sharper tone, "you have heard from Greg again. I am sure of it!"

Kitty had turned paler, but she did not flinch from the gaze of the master. She only drew her dark mantle closer round her shoulders, as though the early morning air was bleak and raw, and said in a low voice—

"Yes, I have heard."

"When?"

"Late last night."

"Where is the message? Where is he? What does he want? Why does he write to you, and take no heed of me?" he asked hurriedly.

Kitty clasped her hands together, and looked away from him.

"I cannot answer your questions," she replied; "in mercy's name, sir, let me keep faith with him."

"And break it with me?"

"God forbid that,—always," answered Kitty.

"But you do that now; you are sure of

it yourself," said Mr. Woodhatch, "when you side with him against me. You turn like all the rest of them. I am not deserving man or woman's confidence."

"Oh, dear master," urged Kitty, "do not look upon it in this awful light! But let me go, and say 'God speed' to me."

"You are going to your doom, child, when you go to such as he is," he answered.

"I do not mind that. And if it is to be so, why, for his sake," said Kitty, "I will go willingly enough."

"For his sake."

"Yes."

"And after all—in his selfishness and trouble—he asks you to come to him, and leave me?"

"No, no; he does not ask me to come," answered Kitty; "I am going against his wish as well as yours."

"Why then——"

"And I am going to save him, if I can. I was always his friend, you know," she added, with a new excitement suddenly asserting itself; "and I want to stand his friend again, if he will have me, as I think he will."

"Where is he?"

Kitty hesitated for a moment again, and then replied to him—

"At Bolter's Rents, where he has been tempted to return so many times. Greg is with them all; he is back again in their midst, he who fought his way so well from them, and now has come to this at last. Ah! sir," she cried, "you will not stop me now, I am sure!"

"Yes—I would."

"I am sorry," was the answer, "but—I must go."

"To Bolter's Rents—where the bad life would begin again, whence no good can ever spring—where Greg will stay."

"Trust me," was all Kitty could respond.

"I have lost trust in every living thing," replied John Woodhatch, "as completely as every human soul has lost all trust in me. So it must be."

"You do not know everything, sir—you——"

"Show me the letter you have received!" he demanded suddenly.

"I cannot," she murmured; "I have destroyed it."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said, and turned as if to leave her. She stopped his progress.

"I am going away, sir. Is there any message for Greg?"

"There is money waiting for his passage abroad—when he writes to me for it. Tell him so if you will."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"Good-bye, sir. If you would only say 'God speed' to me before I go away, I should feel the stronger woman," said Kitty, "for I am not ungrateful—not unmindful of all the good you have tried to do—not, not wholly undeserving, pray believe me."

He stood regarding her very sternly still;—her appeal was lost on him, her wish to get away from him, to go back to Greg and Greg's life was only too apparent. Before he could reply—if he had ever intended a reply to this strange, impulsive girl—there came between them, dressed also as for a journey, the grave figure of the housekeeper.

John Woodhatch broke into a rough unseemly laugh at this.

"What—another departure from my plague-stricken home," he exclaimed, "only one more!"

"Yes, Mr. Woodhatch. Has she not told you?"

"No."

"I am going away with her," said Mrs. Chadderton, "it is my duty, you will see, sir. It is the duty which you will not try to check me in, knowing what she is, and what I am."

"Have you told her——"

"That I am her mother. Yes," was the reply, as she drew Kitty's hand within her arm, "and she does not shrink from me. She will trust me very soon."

"Ah! well," said John Woodhatch very bitterly, "it is right mother and daughter should go together in life—it is more than right in this case, I suppose. I don't know. I don't understand, and I have given up all guessing."

"But——"

"What did you ask me to say just now, Kitty?" he inquired.

“To say ‘God speed,’” she said very earnestly and solicitously.

“Yes, yes, so it was. Well—God speed you two women on your way from Farm Forlorn, and God help you both at Bolter’s Rents!”

CHAPTER XXV.

A LAST LOOK BACK.

THERE was something strange in the good wishes of John Woodhatch, something which these two women did not profess to comprehend. They glanced wistfully at him, but the face was no index to the thoughts of its owner, it was as set and immobile as the Egyptian Sphinx.

And yet it was not difficult to guess what were the thoughts of the master of Farm Forlorn, despite this new impressive attitude. He had told them only a few minutes since that he had lost faith in every living thing as completely as every human soul had lost trust in him. He accepted his position. Not all the protestations of Kitty and her mother could have altered his thoughts. They were going away from him, on a mission which they

feared to communicate, and those whom he had befriended were turning from him for ever. They were in grief, perhaps in doubt, but none the less was it black ingratitude to him ; of this he was certain in his heart.

Here was his last disappointment, his crowning failure, and it was hardening him very quickly. He should have been treated better, he was sure ; but his pride would not let him utter any further reproaches. They did not want his advice—more, they did not want his money—all they wanted was to get away from him. So be it, he would not raise a finger against it. Let them go. He had wished them “ God speed,” he had hoped God would help them in the new dangers which they were rashly seeking for themselves, and there was no more to be said. What were they lingering for, when time was of value to them and him ? he wondered, though he did not put his thoughts into words.

“ We will go away the stronger for your good wishes, sir,” said Mrs. Chadderton ; “ and—it is more than right we should go together. You know this ? ”

“ It is right you should go with her—yes,”

he answered, "you can protect her, if you will."

"If!"

"Ah! yes. I had forgotten you were her mother." He paused a moment, then he said, "What money have you?"

"Oh, sir, I have saved more money than I shall ever want, I hope. Don't talk to me of money," cried Mrs. Chadderton, "don't think that any money from you to me, can pay the help you've been to me and her. Don't think——"

"There, there, I have said 'God speed'; and it is as well to go before the servants come about you with a hundred questions," said John Woodhatch, interrupting her, "thanks only weary me. And you have not much time to spare."

"You are offended with us," cried Kitty; "and yet it is so necessary I should go."

"Does your mother think so as well?"

"No," said Mrs. Chadderton, answering for herself, "but I have no power to stay her."

"So you go with her. Well, good-bye."

"Presently, sir, I will explain," cried Kitty;

“but I am not ungrateful to you, God be my witness. Always in my prayers I shall remember you. And—Greg cannot do without me. That is it—you see, sir. That is the only reason why I go away.”

John Woodhatch nodded gravely, but he was unmoved by her protestations. He could have told her again that Greg having had his chance of escape, there was an end to Greg in every honest mind; but he knew what her reply would be, what it had already been. Greg was first and foremost ever in her thoughts, and the crime he had committed, she, in her interest in him, could readily excuse, even ignore. Greg was everything—and he was nothing. Greg was the lover and the tempter, the old pal, perhaps the child-husband in the old awful times from which he hoped he had rescued them for ever, and to which they were hurrying back—poor storm-driven atoms of humanity, with never a hope for them after that day. He was only the patron, the benefactor; he had no power over them, and his influence weighed but as a feather in the balance. He had not even their confidence when the great troubles came,

which he would have shared with them with all his heart if they had let him. After all, they were afraid of him. That was the miserable sequel to the mis-spent efforts of his life. Meaning for the best, and acting for the best, he had failed in all that he had undertaken, and there was not any one who cared a straw for him, or what his wishes might be. The world was utterly selfish and base. And he was utterly alone in the world; there was only the old dog Carlo, who limped towards him, and sat down at his side, who he felt was really his friend.

"It is hardly safe for Fladge to drive you over to the station, but you can have his services if you wish," he added suddenly.

"No, sir, we will walk," said Kitty.

"It is a fine morning, and you are both good walkers," he remarked coldly; "and your boxes?"

"They were sent to the station late last night."

"I did not know that. But then, I don't know what goes on in this house."

He turned away as if very tired of them, or very anxious to escape any further protesta-

tions of their gratitude or affection. They did not attempt to stay him by a word.

"He will think better of us presently," murmured Kitty; then she passed her arm through her mother's, and the two women went into the sunlit road together. They looked back at the house of mourning, with the white blinds drawn before the windows, and the mother said in a deep, low voice, and almost as in a last appeal—

"It is a hard time to desert him."

"Not desertion, mother. He will be happier without us, now it has come to this," Kitty answered.

"Well, perhaps he may. Still if you had waited till the funeral——"

Kitty wrung her hands together.

"There is no waiting, with Greg in danger, mother. The poor dead friend can wait patiently, but the living man has need of me," said Kitty, "and is in terrible distress of mind."

"He has been in terrible distress of mind for years."

"Ah! true."

"And you love him?"

"Yes."

"And understand him, you say?"

"As no one else does in the world."

"My faith in him is weak," muttered Mrs. Chadderton, "but my fear for you is very strong. And I have been waiting for you for so many years, child, as the master knows."

"Mother, why not let me go alone?" urged Kitty.

"No," cried Mrs. Chadderton, pressing her daughter's hand to her side, "it is for the best. And, after all, I am only one more trouble of his life passing away from his home."

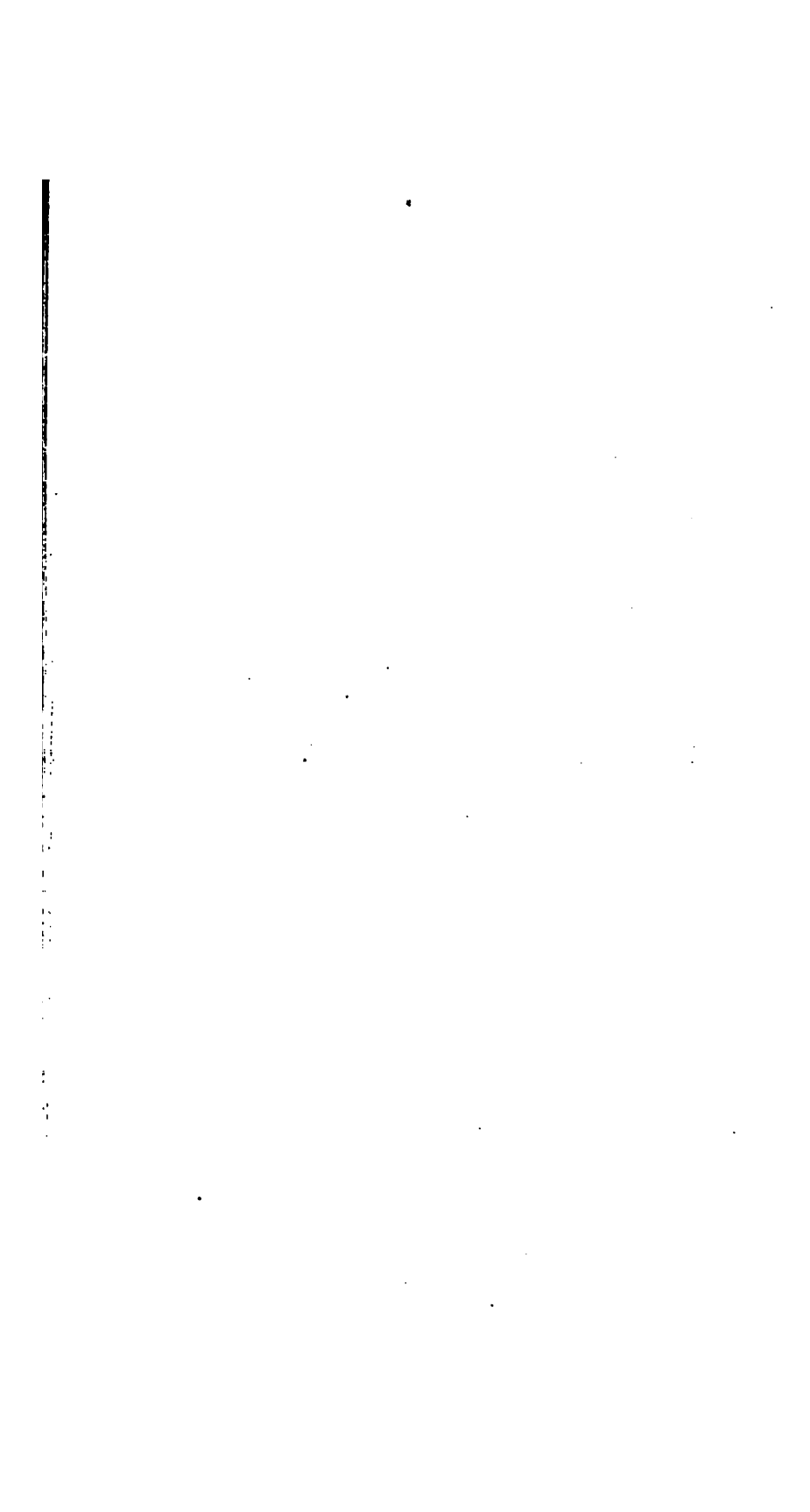
They stopped again at the bend of the road, and looked for the last time at Farm Forlorn—a fair picture in the early morning, with the green trees rustling above the house roof, and the deep blue sky overhead, with the sun shining, and the birds darting to and fro. It was a last look at the old place, to be remembered in the after years of these two wanderers, with their sad faces set once more towards the old dark life. John Woodhatch had said, God help them in it, and they would

need His help very much, and very soon, they knew.

And they saw not Farm Forlorn again. They had taken their last look at it, indeed, as they passed away from its master to the benighted land lying beyond the peaceful life from which they turned away.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

THE MOVING OF THE HANDS.



CHAPTER I.

AFTER THE FUNERAL.

IT was fair summer weather still when they buried Hester Brake, of Boston, in her brother's grave in Skegs Shore churchyard. Kitty and her mother had been away two days then; and to all inquiries concerning them John Woodhatch had shrugged his shoulders and said, "Leave of absence." They had gone away with his permission, and it was nobody's business but their own, he supposed—at all events, not his. Parson Larcom and his daughter had their suspicions of these sudden flittings from the farm, but they did not trouble John Woodhatch with them. There was a something in the farmer's new manner which did not invite—indeed, that repelled—confidence; "a dark hour," which warned his visitors he was not at his

best. Greg and Kitty had possibly made a runaway match of it, and for the mere sake of a runaway match, it appeared; and Mrs. Chadderton had gone to give the bride away. Or else there had been a quarrel between Greg and his master, and the women had started off to bring him back, and act as peacemakers, as women will do sometimes, thought Alec Larcom. At all events, they would know the truth in time. Never a worse man to keep his little troubles, his little plans to himself than John Woodhatch, of Farm Forlorn. John's heart was too full to overflowing to hold its secrets long, the parson thought, not knowing his friend better than the rest of them, or, at least, not gauging to its depths the truth of his strange character.

It had been a quiet funeral in the old place, but there had been considerable interest evinced. Funerals were raree-shows at Skegs Shore, and the master of Farm Forlorn had been expected to make a brave display, it being the first "turn out" from the farm in his time. Morris had not been buried thence, and now Morris's sister—token of the peace

between her and Mr. Woodhatch, and of her perfect confidence in him, despite the old stern doubts which the world had had—was the first to pass from the shelter of the farm to the universal shelter which mother earth affords.

There had been no display, however, and Skegs Shore folk were hardly satisfied. It was not a funeral worthy of John Woodhatch; there were no feathers or mutes, and as for the black hat-bands and streamers, necessary for all decent mourners, they had been irreverently ignored. John Woodhatch had simply carried out Miss Brake's instructions; he had acted mechanically through it all; it was the living, not the dead, which was affecting him. Here was one friend gone, at least—one who had trusted him to the last, and against whom he had not a word to say. What might have been had she lived longer he did not know, he did not care to know; that she would have drifted from him, he was perfectly assured. People tired of him so soon, grew desperately sick of him and his philanthropy together, and hurried away, with a few unmeaning protestations of regard,

leaving him and his shallow theories together, and to die together, for what they knew or cared. This was John Woodhatch's new conviction; and it did not add any brightness to his face when they were all back again at the farm, and the blinds were drawn up, and life seemed to have recommenced in the great house.

"I'm theenking ye're a bit too much ooppressed, John, by all this," said Parson Larcom suddenly; "and yet I've never thought ye a man to give way like a child."

"I have always fancied myself terribly strong," answered the other; "but then it *was* all fancy."

"She's at rast, poor soul; and life on earth was not a parteecularly happy one to her, I take it," added Mr. Larcom.

"I'm not thinking of her," answered the farmer restlessly; "so you need not preach me a sermon on the vanities of life. I do not need any consolation, Alec; I am quite resigned."

"That's waal."

"Where is Lucy? Where is Morice?"

"Lucy is packing up, I think, and Morice is with her," was the reply.

"Ah, yes—packing up to go away; that's true. When do you leave us, old man?" he asked carelessly.

"To-morrow."

"And you think of going abroad?"

"Preesently—very soon, that is," said Mr. Larcom. "There is all this French law and French money to look after; and Lucy is not so strang as she should be, and I'm theenking a change will not do me any harm."

"Change is good for us all," John Woodhatch answered absently; "but then it is a world of change, if we only wait patiently."

"And talking of waiting, John," remarked the parson, "it strikes me that ye show a most deceeded relooctance to read the poor thing's last will and teestament. It's vary woonderful," he added; "but ye don't seem to care what becoomes of her money."

"I do not care."

"Ye would not care if she had not left ye a penny, I'll be boond," he remarked.

"She has not left me a penny," came the echo back.

“ Oh, ye know, then ? ”

“ She told me long ago I should only waste her money on the vile and criminal, or the hopelessly base and the desperately ungrateful,” answered John Woodhatch ; “ and so money would never be of any good in my hands. She was a far-seeing woman, and, Alec, she was right enough.”

He leaned forwards, clasped his big brown hands together, and looked sternly ahead of him. Mr. Larcom filled his pipe slowly, and regarded his friend sideways during the process.

“ What has harppened, John ? ”

“ Very little you would care to hear.”

“ Ye have been disappointed in Greg,” said the parson ; “ I see that.”

“ Yes.”

“ And Kitty ? ” he added shrewdly. “ In Kitty, too ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ I told ye lang ago that scheme of yours would all end unsartisfactorily,” said the parson. “ I was sure of it lang ago. Ye did not go the right way to wark, John, from the vary first.”

“What would you have done?” asked the other sharply. “Here were two souls to be saved, and it was my task to save them. Where has been the mistake?”

Alec Larcom was always ready for argument. Flint and steel would not more surely bring forth sparks of fire than the words of these two men in disputation. Two men of strong opinions, and of contrary opinions, and both dogged and vain—for all their rough-and-ready virtues; it was only Lucy’s tact which had saved many a sharp contest between them.

“Where has been yeer mistake, John?” said the other, leaning back in his chair and puffing his pipe complacently. “Ye have thought too much of your own plans, and too leetle of a friend’s senseeble adveece. Ye have gane on like a bleend mole, theenking yeerself mighty wise and mighty clarver, and that money, good wards, and perfect confeedence, would do everything in time.”

“Yes—that was the idea. Why has it failed?”

“Ye have thought of yeerself, and ye have not taken God into yeer plans. Ye have gane

on as if there wasn't One—and that's jest it, now!" shouted the Methodist. "That's the warst of ye, good as ye are, unseelfish as ye may be, ye haven't been one bit or scrap releegious, or trusted to the—to the adveece of releegious men."

"I thought I knew better than you, you mean?" said John Woodhatch. "Ah! perhaps I did. And where I have failed, you would have failed. They would have never trusted you, Alec; they never liked you, not one of them."

"Ye know narthing—absolutely narthing—about that," said the other decisively.

"As for religious men, what are they? What have they done better than the worldlings, but blunder more, and rave over other people's blunders. "No," he cried, "I am not a religious man."

"It's a peety."

"Are religious men more useful than we are—more generous—more commonly honest?" he said scoffingly. "Do they not think more of themselves, and of the world?—is n money as much their God as yours?"

“John—ye’re raving.”

“And you are forgetting the will, preacher, which has to be read to-night,” said Woodhatch—“the will which leaves all the money to Kitty Vanch, you know.”

“Gard bless us, I don’t know that,” ejaculated Mr. Larcom, as the pipe fell from his mouth, and was shattered to pieces on the floor. “Ye have known this all along, it seems? This is yeer doing—and ye have influenced that poor, mad body to pitch it all away fram us. Ye have turned against Lucy, and Lucy’s child and me, and I am beetterly deesappointed in ye.”

“Never mind the money. Go on with your sermon on human vanities,” said the farmer bitterly. “What *is* money, after all!”

“Ye need not jest—ye have acted vary badly in all this.”

“I have not acted at all. But you are welcome to misjudge me—I am prepared for all that,” he answered sternly; “it will end the story quite consistently.”

“How do you know all the praperty is left to Kitty Vanch?” asked the parson. “Have ye oopened the will?”

“No.”

“Then——”

“She spoke of her money once or twice on the day she died, and told me in what way she had left it.”

“Ye may be meestaken.”

“Likely enough. I am altogether a mistaken man.”

“And this being right, ye could not put in a ward, whilst there was time, for us?” said the parson reproachfully. “Ye who guess what a terreeble grind my life has been—and how I have never known the common carm-forts of life from begeening to end.”

“You have had religion to console you—and it will console you again,” said John Woodhatch.

Alec Larcom looked hard into the stern face of the speaker, like a man who would see a further insult in the words conveyed, and yet was inclined to doubt if there were any fresh bitterness of satire in them. And there was not. John Woodhatch’s anger had died away, and he spoke with some amount of envy of the minister’s power to find consolation and relief where he could not—with sorrow, even,

that it was beyond his own power, he being a stronger and more sceptical man.

He went to the safe, unlocked it, and drew forth the will; and Alec Larcom's hands shook as they were planted on his knees, with a faint effort at composure, pitiable to witness.

"We had better send for Lucy," said John Woodhatch, "she is concerned in this."

"Yes. I had fargotten Lucy, poor child," said Mr. Larcom.

Lucy was sent for, and presently she joined the two men in the farm parlour, looking from one to the other timidly, as she entered, as if in doubt as to the motive which required her presence. Did she remember five years ago in that room too well just then?—the eve of her going away from the farm, when John Woodhatch had told her of her father's wishes, and his knowledge of the hopelessness of the deep love he had always had for her? She seemed relieved when she noticed the papers in John Woodhatch's hands, and John had said—

"There is Miss Brake's will to consider, Lucy—and you may probably be mentioned in it."

"Is it necessary to read it now?" she asked.

"You are going away to-morrow, and there may be something important to consider," he said calmly—so very calmly, that it sounded like a different tone of voice from that which he had always used towards her. She wondered a little what might be in his thoughts, or what her father and he had been discussing together, and then she sat down between them and waited patiently. She was not excited at the possible tenor of the document in John Woodhatch's hands; she looked from him to her father curiously, and for an instant again, before the seal was broken, and the farmer read aloud the last wishes of Hester Brake.

It was a short will; it had evidently not taken long for the testatrix to make up her mind what to do with her money, or to arrange for the disposal of that money after her mind had been once made up. And it was as John Woodhatch had foreshadowed. All the property of which she was possessed, and to which she might be entitled in any way, went absolutely and for ever to her tried friend and companion Katherine

Vanch, and on the one condition that she should not marry Gregory Dorward. Otherwise, the whole of the property was to revert to Lucy Brake. And she appointed Alexander Larcom and a certain solicitor at Boston as executors to her will.

"I shall deeleene to act as axecutar to the doocument," said Mr. Larcom, compressing his thin lips; "I haven't been consolted in the matter, and the lawyer may have it all his own way, for me."

"I think I would act, Alec," John Woodhatch remarked quietly. "It will be for the advantage of your daughter."

"I don't see that."

"Kitty Vanch will marry Greg Dorward," said the farmer.

CHAPTER II.

MORE DEPARTURES.

JOHN WOODHATCH for once proved himself to be a true prophet. He who had been so seldom right in his life, was right in this instance to the very letter of his prediction. It was a little after noon of the following day when a telegram was brought to him, which he read in the front parlour to Lucy and her father.

"From Gregory Dorward to John Woodhatch, Skegs Shore.

"I was married this morning to Kitty. Think as well of us both as you can."

"So the story ends, after all, as I had planned it," said John Woodhatch, in a strangely unexultant tone; "and Kitty Vanch marries Greg."

"She was in a tremendous hurry, all of a sudden," replied Mr. Larcom; "if she had

only waited to hear this will read, I wonder what the effect would have been ? ”

“ She would have married Greg just the same,” was the reply ; “ it is not impossible she knew the whole purport of this will. She was a great deal with Hester Brake at the last.”

“ I hope she did,” said the parson ; “ it will save a great deal of queebbling. Greg’s a sharp fellow, might plead ignorance of the doocument, and put in a claim for his wife, after all. To me it’s not so vary clear that Lucy will get—— ”

“ Never mind the money just now. You will have plenty of time to think over all this abroad, where the money is,” said Woodhatch ; “ and Greg and his wife will have no opposition to offer. When do you leave ? ”

“ I asked Fladge to be ready with the trap in aboot half an hour from this time,” replied the parson. “ We shall go to the cottage for one or two theengs, and then start from Skegs Shore by the five o’clock train.”

“ You will be in France to-morrow, Alec ? ”

“ Yes.”

“And the chapel business here?”

“I have arranged all that. A gentleman from Lincoln will take the chapel in hand. He’s a sensible young man in his way, too, and, I dare say, will succeed me altogether; and,” added Mr. Larcom, “I hope ye will extend to him all the hospitality possible for the sake of an old friend.”

John Woodhatch looked hard at the old friend aforesaid, but did not reply to him. Alec Larcom had forgotten the sharp discussion of the preceding evening, and was in excellent spirits altogether. Kate Vanch’s marriage had followed so quickly on the reading of the will that the fortune seemed secured to him and his daughter before he had had much time to think of it; and a new, bright life was stretching out for them both—a new beginning to all things, with not a care in the way to mar their rejoicing. True, there was something in John Woodhatch that was strange—that would have been exceedingly perplexing had Alec Larcom had the time to think it over at that busy period of preparation for departure—that would have distressed him, had he thought there was real sorrow, real

trouble at the heart of the man whom he had known so long. But Alec Larcom was full of his own projects, full of himself, and his daughter's advancement in the world, full of thoughts of the journey before him, and hardly the same man who had struggled and preached and worked his soul out at Skegs Shore. Prosperity would not wholly improve the Methodist parson, in all probability; but then does great prosperity improve many folk, or any folk? Were not our friends the truer, better, and more straightforward before the golden shower came down from heaven, or up from hell, to gild their ways in life?—and oh! the rich prigs on whom it is a pleasure to turn one's back now.

John Woodhatch was soured with thoughts somewhat akin to these; but he was studiously grave, even polite, to Alec Larcom, and to his daughter Lucy. And he seemed to look at each of them, and at little Morice, and even at Reuben Fladge and his farm servants, in so strange a way, as if they were all people in whom he was perforce still interested, and whom he studied a great deal, and to the last, though without any heart in his work.

Lucy Brake, more watchful than her wont, saw this, and more than this, with a rapidly increasing surprise, and an anxiety for which she could hardly account. Presently she came to him when he was alone, when he was walking in the garden with his hands crossed behind him, after the old fashion which he had, and took her place by his side with the freedom of one ever sure of a welcome. He did not appear surprised at this, but his face did not light up, as usual, at the sight of her. It remained still curiously grave, with a meaning on it utterly impossible to decipher in that hour, and for many hours to come.

"John," said Lucy frankly, "has any one offended you? Have you taken offence at anything that has been said or done of late days?"

"I am not quick to take offence, Lucy," he replied; "and I am not offended."

"Nor hurt?"

"No."

"Nor—nor disappointed?"

"No. I cannot say I am disappointed in anything or anybody."

"But you have altered so much; you are

not the John Woodhatch I have always known," she said. "Since Hester's death you have been so different altogether."

"I am sorry you have remarked it, Lucy, or cared about it in any way," he replied, speaking very slowly; "but I do not deny I *have* altered, possibly have wholly changed with the changes which have come to us, and—more of which are coming."

"I do not see——"

"There will be further changes here. There will be new lives begun and old lives ended before you are back again in Lincolnshire,—if you ever come back, that is," he added.

"Why should I not?"

"You will be happier away—much happier."

"I am not fond of travelling. I am no great hand at making friends, and I believe," she added in a little whisper, "I detest money and people who are fond of it."

"It is not everything, but it is a mighty power," answered Woodhatch, "and is never to be despised."

"Will you tell Kitty for me, please," she said very hurriedly, "that this marriage of hers shall make no difference in her future

prospects, and that she need not feel—neither she nor Greg—any disappointment at the conditions of the will. For I—— ”

She stopped as he touched her arm, and looked at her with the same grave, steady, incomprehensible stare.

“ You will not burden me with commissions, Lucy, which it will be beyond my power to fulfil,” he said.

“ I—I do not understand you,” Lucy said, with her heart beating very rapidly.

“ I shall not see Kitty Vanch, or Greg, ever again. They belong not to my life—they are completely gone. That’s all,” he added.

“ But why ? ”

“ Ah, don’t ask me for explanations,” he said ; “ they are beyond me.”

“ You will write and tell me what you mean, for there is some mystery you are keeping from me, John, some secret, some new project.”

“ Yes, I have a project in my mind, and you shall hear of it soon, Lucy,” he said. “ Forty-five is late in the day for planning it out ; but it will not be kept from you or your father. You are both sure to hear of it.”

"These mysteries are not like you, and are not worthy of one who has been always so outspoken," she murmured reproachfully.

"You will bear with them and me for the few moments that are left," he said very tenderly; "to explain would do no good, and might effect much harm. I want you to forgive me, Lucy, before you go away to-day."

"To forgive you—what? What have I ever had to forgive in my father's friend—my father's own right hand?"

"I am keeping a secret from you," he replied, "a something which you ought to know, but which I dare not tell you—which you shall know later on when you are abroad."

"And why cannot you tell me, or—trust me?"

"It concerns the life of another, and influences that life so much," he answered; "and I would be forgiven blindly in this matter."

"I do not believe I have anything to forgive," said Lucy wonderingly.

"Yes," he responded.

"Then be forgiven, John, with all my heart

and soul. In very gratitude for all the dear old times, believe me," she exclaimed.

"Thank you, Lucy," he answered, as he took her hands in his; "you would bring back those dear old times again to me, if anybody could. But that is quite impossible. There is no stepping back to the old days. It is always onward, step by step, to the night."

"Rather to the brighter day, for such good, earnest men as you."

"I am not a good man, although," he said, after a pause, "I am terribly in earnest."

"Why will you not tell me what is distressing you? Because I am a woman, weak, and vain, and untrustworthy?" she said.

"Because you are the woman who would be distressed with me, and to no useful purpose," he replied; "because you will go away the happier for not knowing; because to know it later on is so very much the better for us all."

"But——"

"But you must not worry me too much, child," he said, with a shade more sternness in his manner, and from which she shrank at

once, it was so new to her; "I cannot bear more even from you."

"Very well," she answered sadly and submissively.

"Ask at the Poste Restante, Paris, for letters, will you, Lucy?"

"Of course, of course. And father or I will write to you to-morrow night, and——"

Again that strange stretching out of his big hand, and reducing her to immediate silence by a touch which seemed to turn her into stone, as the touch of a dead hand might have done.

"Don't write to me, or think of me, yet awhile, till a communication reaches Paris for you," he said; "it will be only waste of time."

"You do not wish to hear from us," she murmured.

"You and your father are going away from my life, and are anxious to go; why should you be troubled by thinking of me? What is the use of it?" he said.

"Yes, John Woodhatch, you are offended with us," cried Lucy, passionately now; "we have done you in your estimation—but God

knows not intentionally—some grievous wrong. And we have a claim to know what you consider that wrong is.”

“You have done me no wrong. I have asked your forgiveness,” he said, “and there is no thought in my heart which is not for the welfare of Alec Larcom and his daughter. What more can I say?”

“Ah! but you do not explain.”

“The explanation will be shortly on its way to you,” he replied. “Do me the justice to wait for it, Lucy; and so leave me now in peace. It is the last thing I ask.”

“I will not harass you any more,” said Lucy in response.

“Not the last thing, quite,” he corrected, “there is one favour more I am going to beg.”

“Well,” said Lucy, “what is that?”

“Come in-doors and play me the *Wedding March*, as you did five years ago. I should be glad to hear it once more in my life,” he said.

“To hear it many times, if you will, when I come back, John.”

“Come back here?” he said.

“Why, yes—why not?”

“You will never come back to Farm For-

lorn," he said; "and that is why I wish you to play to me to-day."

She would not ask him for any further explanation; he would not have given it if she had done so. He spoke in riddles, but there was no solution to them—and he spoke as if they were the explanations rather than the riddles themselves. And, moreover, he took it for granted that she and her father were leaving him for ever, and were only too glad to get away from him, to think of returning to the place. He seemed to imply that he was nothing in their estimation, and that it was as well for all of them it should be so, and she could only trust to time, to a few weeks or months, to disabuse his mind of so unworthy an impression. He was not himself now. The death of Hester Brake had changed him very much; the sudden departure of Greg and Kitty Vanch, and even Mrs. Chadderton, was all part of the mystery which had altered him, and which he had promised to explain when she and her father and Morice were in Paris. This was not the John Woodhatch she had ever known—presently he would be his firm, self-reliant, honest self again, and

not the grave shadow of what he had been. And till that day came, she would wait in peace—wondering, a little, why she should think of it so deeply.

It was a strange time to play Mendelssohn's *Wedding March*, a strange air to select, the day after a funeral ; but it had been a favourite of his, and this was his last wish, and she was going away.

They passed into the farm parlour together, and she took her seat at the grand piano he had bought for her last visit, and played with her old skill, whilst he watched her, and thought of the five years since she had sat there terribly afraid of him and what he was going to say to her. She had not changed in the least, to his observation ; she was the same fair-haired blue-eyed girl, whose beauty trouble had not marred, and before whom might stretch a world of happiness to come, as he prayed to God it might. He had grown grey in earnest in those five long years, and old at heart, and soured and discontented, and had lost faith in everything that claimed a friendship with him. At forty-five years of age, he was an old man—a very old man, he knew—without

a hope in the world, and with just one fleeting, childish fancy to hear her play again in the home to which he had told her she would never come back—and which was a sure prophecy, despite all Lucy's doubts.

"Thank you," he said very gravely, when she had finished. "It was kind of you. I will remember this always."

Before Lucy could reply, if she had thought of replying, Alec Larcom and his granddaughter Morice, came into the room, equipped for their journey, and looking very much astonished.

"What a time to be doddering away at the piano!" exclaimed Mr. Larcom, "and Fladge already ootside with the trap. Get yeer things on, Lucy, for goodness sake."

Lucy withdrew, and Alec Larcom bustled about and looked for sticks, umbrellas, and wrappers, with the customary fussiness of a man going a few miles, and ran in and out of the room half a dozen times, becoming more red and confused with each occasion. John Woodhatch stood looking down at the piano as though Lucy was still sitting there, until little Morice touched his hand.

“ Are you sorry we are going, Mitter Woodhatch ? ” she asked suddenly. “ You look sorry,—oh ! so very.”

“ Yes,” he said ; “ I am sorry.”

When they were outside in the roadway, little Morice, still clinging to his hand, said suddenly—

“ Why don’t you come with us. We should like you to ! ”

“ Ah ! you are kind to think of that, little Morice,” he answered ; “ but that cannot be.”

She was the first to think of it, the only one to think of it, and he was grateful. He stooped and kissed her, placed her between her mother and grandfather, whilst Fladge clambered to the back seat, with his usual weak grin of satisfaction at everybody and everything. And then there were the final good-byes, Mr. Larcom being absent-minded and flurried, with the reins in his hands, and almost too pre-occupied to say farewell, and Lucy as grave as John Woodhatch, now, and with tears swimming in her eyes.

“ Good-bye,” she murmured,” and for all kindness here, our thanks.”

“ Good-bye,” he answered softly.

“ And we’ll see ye again, John, let us hope. And send ye all the news—and let ye know how we’re faring shartly. And good-bye to ye,” cried the parson, flourishing his whip.

“ Good-bye, old Alec,” he replied. But he looked at Lucy, and as they drove away he raised his big felt hat to her, and she marvelled once again at the meaning on his rugged, sunburnt face.

They were gone, and he turned very quickly and like a man of business to the work he had on hand.

“ *Now then,*” he said sternly.

CHAPTER III.

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE ACCOUNTS.

JOHN WOODHATCH seemed to resume all his old energy with the departure of his guests from Farm Forlorn. Before his friends, he had been reserved and stern; with their absence from his homestead, he was more like the old master than he had been during the last week—and yet, after all, the master with a difference. The friendly smile was altogether gone, and was not likely to return, with the dead weight at his heart; the eager eyes were bright and searching, without the light and love in them which had been always there, and the whole expression of the face was marked by the new determination which had been upon his mind some days, and which he had kept back from all concerned in him.

But the men about the farm, the women-

servants in his employ, were to be told readily what he had concealed from Larcom and his daughter; the hour had come to tell them, and he had been waiting for it patiently. With the exodus of his last friends—or those who professed to be his friends still, he thought bitterly—there had arrived the hour for action, and the time to end it all.

“Let everybody on the farm come to me in half an hour’s time,” he said to those who were nearest to him at the moment after the Larcoms’ departure; then he strode away and was busy in his own rooms until the time appointed. He wrote two letters there, one to Mrs. Gregory Dorward, 10, Bolter’s Rents, Drury Lane, and a second to Mrs. Brake, Poste Restante, Paris, and they were both dashed off at a rate which betokened he had made up his mind what to say and how to say it. These letters he put in the breast-pocket of his coat, to post at some future period with his own hands; then he packed with the same haste a big portmanteau which he had not used since his last trip to London, five years ago, thrusting in clothes, papers, banknotes, loose money, with very little heed

as to the method of arrangement. A man bent on flight from his pursuers would have packed in that wild manner, as against time which might discomfit him, if he were not quick in preparation; and yet, when the task was accomplished, he sat down and stared at his work in a very absent fashion.

To the minute of the appointed time, he was at his post in the farm parlour, with a crowd of eager, sunburnt faces surrounding him, looking in at the windows, peering round the doors—the whole retinue of Farm Forlorn, the rank and file of the grim regiment he had enlisted in his service, and, as he had hoped, in God's, until this day of disappointment. They were all there, and, massed together thus, presented a remarkable testimony, as it were—and as he thought in that hour—of the hopeless nature of the task which he had set himself so long to carry out.

No wonder he had failed, with this material to work upon, and with his one theory that man required but his chance to pass from darkness unto light, seeing the one example in himself of what an earnest, honest resolution might effect. All this, is own intolerable

conceit, he knew now, for in himself he was a total failure! He had failed in securing happiness, or confidence, or common respect. No one trusted him, and everybody turned away from him when self-interest, or a blind selfishness which knew not what was best, impelled man or woman to take the side against him. He had been simply tolerated all these years, and there was no one really to care for him, and plenty of folk to suspect him and his motives, and to set against him always the history of his early life. No one had believed in true repentance but himself, and his had been a mad belief which had ended in this downfall. So be it. He had done his best, but it was not for a man like him to succeed in Christian work. He was not good enough. He gave up, now, for good!

In a few words he told this to his startled listeners, regarding them gravely, as parts of the gigantic failure to which he had succumbed; but he spoke not unkindly, only like one who had made up his mind to end this comedy of philanthropy summarily and completely.

“You will all do as well without me in

the world as with me," he concluded; "you will get your living, most of you, honestly and fairly, I hope—and there will be no one to preach at you any more. It is a wide county, and there is plenty of room, and, after all, it is not the worst recommendation to come from Woodhatch's farm. And so good luck to you, men and women, and don't forget the master altogether. He will think of you very often."

The faces betrayed blank astonishment rather than regret; but there were one or two lips quivering in the crowd, one or two hearts touched by the few rough words of explanation he had proffered them, one or two rugged, desperate natures which he had distrusted most, the most affected and cast down.

"And now you have only to receive your wages in advance—to pack up to-day and go," he said, drawing a large canvas bag of money to his side.

"Now!" echoed one or two, and "To-day!" was murmured like a chorus in the background.

"It all ends in another hour—and I shall be very glad if you have all left by that time,"

he answered. "It will put you to some inconvenience, especially you women, but I will remember that in your wages. Money must make the amends it can for the extra trouble which I give you. And if you are not satisfied with what I give, tell me so at once; there will be no time for reparation the next day."

"But the horses—the stock—the crops?" asked many wondering voices.

"They are sold; the stock will be fetched away almost immediately," he added, looking at his watch.

"And the farm, sir; who takes the farm?"

"No one takes it," he answered; "it is my own property, and will not be let again. This is Farm Forlorn, and will remain so to the end."

They did not understand him, but they asked him no more questions. There was that in his looks which checked further inquiries from his dependents; there had been always times when John Woodhatch was a man not be trifled with, or even reasoned with, and this was one of them. They were to receive their wages and depart; and they were liberal

wages which he paid them in full of all demands, being prone that day to mark their progress with gold pieces. Only one man of the number responded to the hint conveyed to them a few minutes ago, and he had been there but three weeks, and had been dissatisfied from the moment of his advent. He turned the money over in his hand, and thought it was not sufficient considering the lateness of the season, and the long distance to his native place, where there might be his only chance of getting work again; but as John Woodhatch put his hand mechanically into his money-bag, the man was hustled in hot haste from the room, and thrust out by impetuous and indignant force into the roadway. The master did not seem to notice this outburst of virtuous feeling—the resolve that his liberality should not be imposed upon by this new “greedy hound”—and presently he was sitting there alone, having shaken hands with the last servant and received the last good wishes for his future welfare.

And there he sat till they were gone, the noise and confusion in the big farmhouse troubling him not at all. Men came from

distant farms, true to their appointed time, and drove away every living thing upon the estate; the servants melted by degrees; there was a grand exodus towards Skegs Shore village, a long procession of people who were not living in the cottages round about the farm, and who, seized with John Woodhatch's impetuosity, hastened away at once.

Reuben Fladge, bringing the horse and trap homewards from the parson's house, pulled up dismayed at the first group which he encountered, and bawled forth his questions as to the meaning of it all, receiving it with open mouth and blinking eyes, and gasping for his breath after the news had been imparted to him.

"It's a lie; it ain't so. I tell you it's a lie," he shouted, as he drove off again; stopping at each fresh group he met upon the way and asking the same questions, and vociferating his indignant denial of it all after each fresh supply of information, flourishing his whip above his head in his excitement, and like the poor, half-mad thing he was.

"It ain't true. He wouldn't have forgot me like this, or told me naught about it. It's

every bit a lie," he was muttering to himself still when he reached the farm, where he found the doors closed and the windows barred, as if death had stepped into the house again. But the master was waiting for him. He *had* not forgotten him. All had been thought out very carefully, and John Woodhatch had never been more methodical.

He stepped out of the house with the big portmanteau in his hands, and pitched it into the trap by the side of Reuben Fladge.

"You'll have to drive back to Skegs Shore, Fladge, and leave this with the station-master. I will call for it before the last train to Hull comes in to-night."

"But—but you ain't agoing away all at once like this?" jerked forth Fladge; "you ain't going to leave me here alone, master, without you? Oh, that can't be!"

"There, there, we must not have any raving in the broad daylight, Fladge," said John Woodhatch, taken aback by this demonstrative fellow, and remembering suddenly the hour of a previous parting with him, and the trouble he had been; "just sit there and listen to my instructions."

A firm, decisive tone was best with Reuben Fladge when the fit was on him of rash impulsiveness. The servant looked hard at the master, but was silent and attentive.

"You understand about that portmanteau—what I want done with it?" said John Woodhatch. Then he reiterated his instructions, and Reuben Fladge nodded his head, and when the master had concluded, said—

"I'll take care of it till you come."

"No. You will leave it at the station, I tell you."

"But, look here——"

John Woodhatch would not wait for Reuben Fladge's argument upon this part of the question, but went on with further instructions as to the future course of action of his subordinate.

"You will drive from the station to Bleathorpe—to Tolland's farm—and there remain until you hear from me."

"You said I wasn't to go there ever any more," Fladge muttered. "I don't like Tolland's farm."

"Why?"

"It ain't like home," he answered sullenly;

"this has only been my home. There's been bad luck everywhere else."

"Try and like it, Fladge. It may be yours some day," was the reply.

"Mine! Ho, ho! What would be the good of it to me?" he cried.

"Sell it, then, and do something better with the money. For it is yours, man," said Woodhatch, "and the deeds will reach you to-morrow in your own house."

"Good Gord!" exclaimed Fladge.

"At all events, it's a chance," remarked the master. "And every man should have his chance. Don't you see that yet?"

Fladge shook his head, and flicked the ears of the horse before him with his whip. He had recovered his equanimity and was stolid and passive.

"I don't want anythin' o' that sort," he said; "it's not in my line—it's not what I've been used to."

"There will be money to your account in Bleathorpe Bank, and you can't make a worse mess of it than I have. And," he added, "you may succeed."

"No, I shouldn't."

"But the thing is done," said John Woodhatch with an angry stamp of his foot, "and cannot be undone. You are the one man I have wronged in my life, in thinking you were the murderer of Morris Brake, and yet you are the only one who has been faithful to me, and will be sorry when I have gone. I am rich, and you are a poor dolt looked down upon in Lincolnshire—and it is settled you shall have this farm. You hear this. Do with it what you will when I am gone—that is nothing to me; I shall not care what you do."

"Where are you going, master?" asked Fladge.

"That is a question you have no right to ask."

"Can't I go with you?"

"No. Impossible."

"It's all I want, Mr. Woodhatch," said Reuben very slowly. "To be with you—or near you. I don't want no more than that—and not having it, nothin's any good to me. And I won't take nothin', and that's Gord's truth."

John Woodhatch turned away and walked

the whole length of Farm Forlorn before he came back to the chaise in which this blank-visaged being was ensconced. He was almost unmanned; here was one evidence at least, and at last, of his work not having been in vain. A strange, burlesque evidence of his success, but marked by real gratitude and an unselfish affection—two of the rarest qualities under the sun.

“I am going away alone, and a long distance, where I shall be only at peace alone, Fladge,” he said, “and I am never coming back.”

“Oh, don’t say that. All of a sudden, too, like this!”

“And you will make my going away a harder task than it is, by taking any notice of it. And so, Fladge, drive to Tolland’s farm after you have been to Skegs Shore again, and think it your home and begin life afresh.”

“It ain’t fit for me,” muttered Fladge.

“I wish it.”

“Ay,” said Fladge with a short nod, and without looking at the master again.

John Woodhatch walked back to the house,

passed in and closed the door behind him, thus terminating all further discussion with this dull-witted subordinate. He had issued his decree and there was no more to be said, he thought. He would benefit this man who did not care for benefits, and to whom benefits would not do any good. So much more waste money; but that did not matter. He could only offer his money, not his love, to a weakling like this, and though that might do even harm to such a being as Reuben Fladge, it was all he could do.

Reuben looked over his shoulder as the door of the farm closed noisily, and took the hint which was conveyed by it. His master had not wished him good-bye, and, though he might think he had finished with him thus, he was out of his reckoning this time, and no mistake. Reuben stared for a while at the farm, at the closed windows and doors, at the aspect of desolation which it seemed already to possess, and then with a half-groan, half-sigh born of the excess of thought which was troubling him that day, he drove away in the direction of the railway station.

CHAPTER IV.

THE END OF FARM FORLORN.

Yes, the old farm had looked like desolation when Reuben Fladge had driven away from it. The absence of life about it was singularly marked, although human life had only vanished in the afternoon, and it was not yet sundown. And life was not all gone from it even, for the master of Farm Forlorn had locked himself in with his household gods, and was very busy after his fashion. In the cottages round about the farm, and in the lower level where old Spikins had died, making so much mischief—all the mischief—in his last helpless days, it was known that Master Woodhatch was still within the house, and hence the villagers kept in the background, guessing instinctively that the master wished to be alone. But in the cottages, and in the road

before the cottages, men and women stood in groups and talked the matter over, and speculated on the reason of it all, and why John Woodhatch in this unseemly haste had paid them in full of all demands and done with them for ever.

Knowing not the truth, dreaming not of what a man can do stung to his heart's core by disappointment and ingratitude, being only aware that John Woodhatch was a liberal giver and liked odd folk and prison-folk about him, they, with the facility for easy lying patent to ignorance in general, constructed their own history of the case, and set it down for gospel. Something had been found out, and it was necessary for John Woodhatch to get clear off. Nothing remarkable in this, for there was something to be found out in most of the lives round about this place—this being shadow-land and these its shadows. But it was certain the master must be gone. And though they would have been glad to know the exact facts of the case, and whether murder or robbery or some gigantic swindle was at the bottom of the explanation, still in the aggregate they wished John Woodhatch

might get comfortably away before the "slops" from Lincoln or Boston came and collared him. There were two or three strangers in the place that day, who might be after the master already, and have warrants in their pockets for him; who could tell? One man professed to be there out of curiosity, and another to have heard of sales at Farm Forlorn, and have come too late in the day to drive any bargain with the owner; but they were men who sat together still in the tap-room of the wayside inn, and looked out of window at the stragglers, and as if half afraid of them, and what they might attempt in the way of rescue presently. Still they were men who might be brokers balked in making a seizure, now that the doors and windows of the place were closely barred, and the master as safe within the walls as in a fortress.

The people talked in "the open" as though they had some inkling they should see the master again, and learn more of him and his motives, if they were vigilant, before the stars shone out. But the day stole away, and the stars were glittering above them, and old Carlo was heard barking within the farmyard,

a sign of life and vigour at the old place yet, when one or two stragglers, getting tired at last of keeping the respectful distance which they had maintained all the afternoon, slouched past the farm and along the high-road, with their hands in their pockets and their feet scuffling up the dust—men struck out of work and already tired of the position. The farm looked very black and gaunt as the twilight deepened into night, and the trees rustled more ominously above it as though they had some cognizance of evil with the oncoming of a later hour. Presently, to the amazement of more than one pair of watchful ears pricked up that night, the old dog Carlo was heard barking a good quarter of a mile away, and it was suspected then that the master had stolen from the house by the garden door, and gone the short cut across the sand-hills to the sea. He wished to get away without any more adieux, unless he was coming back again to take care of his property after one of his wild walks on the shore, and after the habit that he had always had. The inhabitants were not certain, and did not go in search of him. They were careful folk,

who did not care for walks on the sand after dark, with the awful wind tearing across hundreds of miles of sea at them, and with rank desolation right and left—they would leave all that to John Woodhatch with great pleasure. Presently they grew tired of talking over the matter even, being early people, with sleepy wives; and doors were shut and lights extinguished in the cottage windows, and only a few poor reckless souls without wives or without much care for them or for the morrow, and with extra money—John Woodhatch's money—to spend upon sour beer, proceeded to the inn, to inspect the strangers again, and take their turn at drinking hard. And the great old farm stood like a giant house beyond them, and grew blacker and blacker with the night, merging itself in the night's density at last, and then suddenly and awfully waking up to light. Waking to a deep red light of hidden flame within, which shone forth luridly through cracks of wooden shutters and fissures in the doors and above the shutters, where the strips of latticed glass were, and where every twisted pattern of the leaden frames became distinctly marked by a flickering light

within, until the glass splintered and shivered with the heat, and smoke and sparks and fire came forth from a dozen parts at once, and each remote, sure sign of the incendiary having been at work. The flames made steady progress, and stole like fiery serpents from room to room and corridor to corridor, crackling and snapping each scrap of wood-work in its progress; and drowsy folk within a hundred yards dreamed not of dire disaster, till the ostler of the inn, crossing his stable-yard, was startled by the crimson light upon the cobble-stones, and looked up at the red sky and along the road towards the farm, as though the vision of judgment had come suddenly upon him. It was soon known, then, and Skegs Shore woke up to active life with its first wild cry of "Fire!"

All Skegs Shore became busy and excited and half mad, and people ran to and fro and shouted "Fire!" and women and children screamed, and those in other villages and at Skegs Shore proper woke up to the warning in the sky, and in all haste made for Farm Forlorn, the common centre of disaster. The old parish engine was being unearthed and

getting ready for the journey, and the telegraph wires were flashing the news to busier centres and asking for assistance. Meanwhile, by the light of his own burning home, John Woodhatch strode rapidly away. There was no longer darkness on his path; his favourite walk when his mind was ill at ease—as it had been so many times in his life—was steeped no more in blackness, but aglow with crimson and gold, where the wet sands caught the reflection of the sky and the waves grew bright with it.

He stopped once and looked back, and muttered “So soon,” and then resumed his way, Carlo looking up at him as if he were as much puzzled by the master as those who had served him, and whom he had left behind that night with a grand spectacle of flame, as a wind up to his life with them.

John Woodhatch had not the sands to himself now. All Skegs Shore was bent on sight-seeing. A few figures ran past him, knowing the short cut to the farm as well as he, some glancing at him as they ran, and one man recognizing him and calling out his name, to which he took no heed, but strode on more

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rapidly. Presently, when he was close upon the old ship's skeleton, some one darted towards him full of excitement, and caught him by the arm. There was no need to ask who it was that stayed his progress thus unceremoniously; there was no time, had John Woodhatch been in ignorance, for, in a husky, agitated voice, Reuben Fladge cried out—

“Master, the farm! the farm!”

“What are you doing here?” said Woodhatch angrily; “why are you lurking in this spot? Why are you not at Bleathorpe, as I ordered you?”

“I have been waiting for you. I knew you would come this way; I wanted so to see you again,” he cried. “You won’t be angry. The farm—oh! the farm is——”

“Yes; I know. Don’t scream over it,” said Woodhatch, interrupting him; “it is a fit and proper thing, Fladge, that that should be the end of it.”

He pointed back to the red sky, and the flames rising brightly in it, and the sparks which were drifting out to sea in one continuous stream of golden flakes, with the

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thick, heavy wreaths of smoke following them like fate.

"Oh, master!" cried Fladge, bursting into tears; "you have burnt it down, then!"

"Yes, I have."

"Oh, lor'! what will they do to you for that?"

John Woodhatch laughed scornfully.

"Anything they like; and I don't know if I should protest," he answered. "But there, you must not make this noise, or we shall have many spies about us. I have done no one harm in this; it was my own house, bought with my own savings, and it is better a ruin. I choose to have it a ruin, Fladge," he added, taking him by the arm, the better to impress the fact on his companion's mind; "and when you hear fools and liars talking of this, tell them so from me."

"Why did you burn it down?" gasped Fladge, glancing at his master, and half afraid of him and his manner, which was new to him.

John Woodhatch had never been a man to brook much questioning, but he made no protest in this instance to Reuben Fladge's inquiries. He was a man anxious to ex-

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plain to this one being, whose brain was not able to receive it, the motives for his desperate act. His anger at the sight of Reuben had vanished, and his voice was low and earnest as he walked on with Fladge, his arm still linked in his.

"I burned it down, Fladge, because in that house I had met nothing but grievous shame and gross ingratitude," he said. "I wanted—I, a poor thief-born wretch—to act as God Almighty in this place and rule as king and saviour. I wanted to be talked of as a great reformer of bad lives, a wondrous man, who, having known what crime was, and what temptation was, knew best the way to lead poor sinners from them. And I knew nothing—not even myself—and have been laughed at for my pains. Do you think you understand me?"

"Hardly, sir—hardly."

"Try and do so when you are alone, so that you can tell this story when I am a long way from Skegs Shore. For you are left, Fladge, to fight my battles here," he said—"you who stood by me to the very last, and was the one friend left when the wreck came."

"I—I don't see it clear," whimpered Fladge, again; "I can't. Where are you going, master—tell me that? And what are you going to do?"

John Woodhatch did not reply to these two extra questions. They were of the class to which he would hazard no reply. But he went on in his own way—

"You will go to Bleathorpe, and see what can be done there, Reuben; and you will take care of old Carlo for me till he dies, I know."

"That I will," Fladge answered.

"I had intended to drown him to-night, out of his misery—the misery of a master's loss, Fladge, and which a dog feels most," he muttered to himself; "but your lurking here to-night has saved the little life that's left him."

"Ay—is that it?" said the troubled Reuben.

Here John Woodhatch came to a full stop, and Fladge and Carlo stopped with him.

"I was rough and bearish to you when I saw you first," Woodhatch remarked; "let me say good-bye to you. And I'm sorry you should have had any harsh words of mine to-night to

sting you. But I am not quite like myself—and I dare say," he added, with another short, mocking laugh, "I shall never be myself again; who knows?"

Fladge regarded him wistfully. As John Woodhatch held out his hand towards him in farewell greeting, he did not withdraw his own hands from the pockets into which a moment since he had thrust them.

"Why can't I go with you?" asked Fladge.

"I have said it's impossible."

"You'll want somebody—you ain't fond of your own company; and I'll never say a word or do a single thing to make you say, 'I'm sorry I took the feller with me,'" pleaded Fladge.

It was true earnestness, and for an instant John Woodhatch wavered, although Reuben Fladge was not aware of it.

"It can't be. At all events at present. Perhaps," he added, "I may write to you in time to come—write to Bleathorpe, where you will be."

"Ah! that's no good," muttered Fladge; "you don't mean it?"

"Well, good-bye."

“What are you going to Hull for?” asked Fladge. “You said you was going to Hull.”

“It’s a handy place to start from, and the ships sail out night and day, hour after hour, to new worlds, new hopes, new lives. And, Fladge, I am very tired of the old life. There,” he said, “will that do? I can explain no more than that.”

“Yes. I make out—some of it,” answered Fladge.

“Then good-bye—and God make a man of you, and a good man.”

“Thank you, sir,” answered Fladge very humbly, and even inclining his head, as a suppliant might do receiving a benediction from his priest; “thankee, master, and—God bless *you*—allers!”

“Thanks, Fladge; I will value your last wish for me. And good-bye again,” he said, extending his hand once more. “Why the devil don’t you say good-bye?” he cried petulantly at last.

“I ain’t agoing yet awhile.”

“But you must.”

“My way’s your way,” said Fladge. “There’s

the horse and trap at the Swan, and I've got to fetch it."

"I am not going to the Swan."

"No; but you're going that way," replied Fladge, still persistent, not to say obstinate.

John Woodhatch shrugged his shoulders, and pressed the question no further. He walked on moodily towards the sand-banks where the pathway met the sea-shore and led to the village where he was known so well, and where Lucy Brake had lived to this day. A poor, weak, loving, warm-hearted little woman, this Lucy, and not fit for him in any way, he thought very suddenly and remarkably just then, but the only woman in all his life whom he had ever thought of loving, and would have made an idol of, in his own clumsy way. Where was she now? he wondered. And why had she, with all the rest of them, gone away so easily from him, with a few commonplace expressions of regret? She might have guessed they would never meet again—that that had been his fixed resolve from the hour her father thought of giving up Skegs Shore.

He walked on, thinking of her still, and Fladge and Carlo followed in the rear. The

sky was all ablaze, and lighted him along the footpath to Skegs Shore—the old gilt tips to the vane upon the church tower seemed like little jets of flame that night, and the glass windows in the quiet village were bright with dancing lights.

There had been a rare race of the inhabitants to the farm, but there were a few dark figures dotting the main street, too indolent to make the journey, or too indifferent to sight-seeing, or with too much business at home upon their minds; and there was quite a crowd of idlers round the doors of the Swan, all talking of the fire, and of John Woodhatch, and all with their faces turned to the red glare in the sky. One or two persons were hurrying in the distance towards the railway station where the down train was nearly due, and it was John Woodhatch who, seeing them, was reminded of the time, and took longer strides in their direction.

But the master of Farm Forlorn was recognized by those left behind in the old village, and more than one called out his name as he stepped into the foreground, and a few came running after him. He turned abruptly aside with the object of evading them and the

hundred questions which would be hurled at him, but they intercepted him at right angles, and were in front of him again, two men, on whom he had never set eyes before, standing completely in his way.

"Mr. Woodhatch," said one of them.

"Yes; but I am pressed for time, and have the Hull train to catch," he said, striding by.

"Very sorry, sir," replied the man, as he and his companion kept pace with him, "but you can't go that journey yet awhile!"

"Why not?"

"Very sorry, sir," he said again, "but I am a constable, and it's my business and my unpleasant duty—to arrest you."

"To arrest me!" exclaimed John Woodhatch.

"Yes, sir; that's it."

"It is my own farm, and no one's loss but mine, you fool!" he thundered forth.

"I don't know anything about the farm, Mr. Woodhatch," said the officer; "mine's a different affair, and I hope you'll come quietly with us, and save all fuss and bother."

He glanced at the stalwart proportions of the farmer and trusted sincerely that he would.

"What is your charge?" asked John Woodhatch calmly.

"Murder."

"Murder!" repeated the accused man; and "Murder!" echoed Reuben Fladge, in a higher key.

"Yes, sir. The old Morris Brake business, I'm sorry to say," replied the man, still deferentially; "and you'll come quietly, I hope."

"Yes," replied John Woodhatch, "quietly enough, my man. I am your prisoner."

CHAPTER V.

ON REMAND.

MORE news for this quiet and sleepy part of green old Lincolnshire—this dead-and-alive Skegs Shore, where news, as a rule, flew by and left no trace, like carrier pigeons with tidings for a busier sphere. Moreover, here was news to be transmitted from Skegs Shore to English towns and cities, to the mighty London even, many miles away—news which might interest folk who had forgotten this dull, flat strip of coast, but remembered something about a murder near it years and years ago.

And now the murderer was discovered, and the whole story, with strange, supplementary details born of the mighty imaginations of descriptive reporters paid to make the most of it, cropped up afresh in the newspapers,

and, Heaven be praised, 'at a slack time of year, when politicians were grouse-shouting, or, if extra energetic, wearying provincial and scanty audiences with second-hand platitudes, stage thunder, and blue fire—with dismal prophecies of the country going to ruin for not taking their advice, or hymns of praise and glory for taking it implicitly and being none the better for it, just at present. The Skegs Shore murder came as a relief to the wind and water of the dull season, and people talked of it and grew interested in it, and saw love and jealousy and deep, dire revenge in it, and heaps of mystery, and all the component atoms of a big sensation.

It was a murder well pieced together, and the general public gave no thought to the possibility of the innocence of the man now under arrest. It was so indisputable a chain of evidence; it was as everybody had thought; it was as clear as day, as true as gospel; it was absolutely natural.

John Woodhatch and Morris Brake had been rivals for the affection of the parson's paughter, and when the former had discovered the secret marriage of his pupil with the

object of his love, he had waylaid and killed the youth who had supplanted him. These had always been the facts of the case, people said down in Lincolnshire, but in the absence of proof, and with a liberal expenditure of money, and an artful attempt to pose as a philanthropist, John Woodhatch had almost lived down the first suspicion which had fastened on him. And now the murder was out, and the proofs rose like ghosts from the grave of the slain man, and all was bare in the white light of God's day, with the Hands of Justice closing on the guilty one at last. A grand moral that sin should not have all its own way, and there was retribution to follow the commission of it.

It was known now that the weapon with which the murder was committed had been buried in the sands, and that the name of John Woodhatch was on the handle. The farmer and one Reuben Fladge, a mere tool of a stronger mind, it was asserted, had been seen together digging up this spud one dark night and sinking it deeper again for more security. There was an old cap found also, a something Woodhatch had worn probably

by way of a disguise ; and the weapon had been missed from the night of the murder, and hidden here in preference to hurling it into the sea, which would have ebbed away along the level sands, and left the weapon shining on the sands with the next outflow of the tide. The murderer knew that very well, and understood the coast. This Reuben Fladge was probably an accomplice, and would turn Queen's evidence when frightened a little more, the good, worthy, perspicacious, general public thought. He would make the whole story stronger, having been bribed heavily, for even a farm called Tolland's had been settled on him for no earthly reason that any one could conceive, save as a price upon his silence.

The evidence was somewhat weak at present, but the discovery of the spud would lead to business. Already it had been ascertained that John Woodhatch was not at his farm on the night of the murder, but on the sands, creeping stealthily in the direction of Skegs Shore ; and the police were anxious to discover the whereabouts of a certain Mrs. Chadderton, who had sat up for him that

night, and who had evidently disappeared from Farm Forlorn rather than be a witness in the case. Here was another party bribed and sent out of the way, John Woodhatch having had an inkling that the deed was being talked about again, and himself once more suspected. A deep, designing man this Woodhatch—a desperate character, and ready with the knife even as a boy, and one who might have been hanged for murder as a boy, if his victim had not been mercifully spared. They had all his antecedents in the papers now; the mighty Press had him by the throat. And then to burn down the farm, and doubtless with many proofs of his crime therein; to pay his servants heavily to keep them on his side, in case of an arrest, and rescue him—if the destruction of his farm should not divert the attention of Skegs Shore folk so completely from the village as to enable him to slip away to Hull, thence to take ship away and be lost.

By some mysterious means he had been warned of his danger early on that day, but had acted just a little clumsily in some respects, and so had come to grief. Always

the way with these calculating criminals—a merciful dispensation it was that they should help to put the hangman's rope around their own necks, when left to their nefarious devices.

There were two letters found upon the prisoner also, it was said, which tended to implicate him more deeply than even the new evidence which had cropped up to his detriment. One letter was to a Mrs. Gregory Dorward, the wife of a deserving youth who had left Farm Forlorn, probably in disgust at the conduct of its owner, telling her where money would be found to pay the passage out to Canada of herself and husband, and hinting that they were better away out of England, and might rely on further help from him when they required it. This was further evidence of bribery and corruption. The second letter—and strange that it should be so, it was thought at first—was written to the widow of the murdered man, who also, as if doubting him at last, had left suddenly for Paris, to which city the letter he had never posted—as though he had been afraid to place himself in her power—was addressed. Herein was allusion to the murder, as the motive for some

forgiveness which he had asked of the young widow, and she had granted him, not knowing for what offence. "I knew who had killed Morris, and I kept the truth from you, for the sake of your own peace!" he had written very vaguely, although she would guess the truth at once, he knew, when he was far away from England and beyond all chance of capture. Of course there were hypocritical wishes for her happiness, allusions to old times, and the old love he had had for her; words of long farewell, and words which were incoherent, or of a meaning which only Mrs. Lucy Brake could satisfactorily explain. It would be necessary to find Mrs. Gregory Dorward and Mrs. Brake, two beings who had occupied almost the last moments of Mr. Woodhatch before he had made a bonfire of his property. They would throw a light upon the dark corners of this *cause célèbre*, and add to the interest of the plot. But neither Mrs. Gregory Dorward nor Mrs. Morris Brake were readily discoverable; the Dorwards, a disreputable gang, as it transpired, had disappeared from Bolter's Rents a day or two ago, and up to present date the Brakes had not been

discovered in Paris. Meanwhile the first examination of John Woodhatch before a bench of magistrates at Lincoln was duly reported in the papers; and the facts, more or less distorted, which had led to his arrest, and which we have foreshadowed, were set before many dull but worthy gentlemen.

One fact was startling, for a man who had maintained some position in the county, and whose badly packed portmanteau—unmistakably significant of sudden flight and haste—was crammed with notes drawn from his own bankers twenty-four hours before; and that fact was, the prisoner remained completely undefended. He had refused to send for his solicitor, or to employ a counsel; it was not worth while, he said; and it was remarked in court that he regarded the whole matter apathetically, as if he were a half-interested witness in the case rather than the party principally concerned, and over whose head was hanging so terrible a charge. He said not a word to criminate himself, which was a wise proceeding; he did not even state that he was innocent, and to the evidence against him he listened with a languid interest

which must have been sheer affectation, sceptical people thought.

There would have been a lack of sensation in the whole matter altogether, had not the preliminary business been enlivened by the putting of Reuben Fladge into the witness-box against his will, and swearing him to the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; which, to all outward seeming, he particularly objected to, raving and protesting and blundering and contradicting, and feigning to be idiotic; even raising the ire of the bench and the observant public, and then convulsing both with laughter.

It was a bad case, and went against John Woodhatch from the first. This Reuben Fladge would get himself into trouble presently, it was considered; and, if not more explicit on the next occasion, might find himself in the dock along with his master. He was a bad one; had once upon a time borne the worst of characters, and it was not unlikely had had something after all to do with the commission of the crime. Still he was not arrested, although detectives were told off to keep an eye upon him until the

next examination ; which they did, and found it dreadfully tiresome work, Reuben being prone to long, swift walks of twenty-five miles or so at a stretch, without any object that was apparent, save to render himself disagreeable, and trot the official force of Lincolnshire completely off its legs. He behaved like a madman in his perambulations, too ; flinging up his arms and raving at the sky, and calling to all kinds of people to come and help his master ; he was altogether “playing a pretty game,” it was asserted by the exhausted police detailed to follow him, and who were dead beat already. Only the master of Farm Forlorn was calm and grave, and terribly at his ease. He would see no one ; to those who came by special order to see him, or wrote to offer in one way or another their services or sympathy—there were a few of these folk, to his great surprise—he sent word to thank them, and to decline their kind offers of interposition on his behalf. In his cell, under remand, he sat and thought a great deal, but he asked no one for the news beyond his prison walls.

“What does it matter now !” he was heard

to mutter once in the airing-yard when he was taking his exercise with other unfortunates to whom bail had been refused, and on whom this Justice—grand and stern and merciless—had laid its mighty Hands—“what does it matter now !”

CHAPTER VI.

HOW IT MATTERED TO LUCY BRAKE.

MEANWHILE the news of John Woodhatch's arrest did not reach the ears of Parson Larcom and his daughter.

"They think me guilty; they do not care to write to me, or ask a single question. They think the very worst," John Woodhatch said to himself; and meanwhile they were proceeding on their holiday without a suspicion of what had happened to Farm Forlorn and its owner, without the faintest idea that they were being sought for by busy folk, anxious to constitute them principal characters in this story.

They had proceeded straight to Paris, where Mr. Larcom, with a horror of hotels and the expenses to which he might be subjected therein, had procured apartments in a little

side street near the Rue de Richelieu. They did not dash into a round of sight-seeing, after the fashion of new-comers to the gay city; sight-seeing was hardly in Mr. Larcom's life, and they were scarcely in the fit and proper mood to enjoy this great change in their lives, they discovered, after they had attempted to settle down. There was much business to attend to, trustees to find, and their own identity to establish, and much wearisome business in understanding where the money was, and how it was to be transferred, and all this in a language which Lucy but imperfectly understood and Mr. Larcom knew nothing of; and when business was over for the day, they were too tired for that fair amount of distraction to which Englishmen in Paris consider themselves entitled.

Then it happened that little Morice fell ill, and there came a grave anxiety to the young mother, and no more thought of holiday-making, or even of money-making, to the Larcoms.

Mr. Larcom began to grow very sick of wandering about the streets without Lucy and Morice, and to wish in his heart for an

excuse to return to Skegs Shore. It began to impress itself slowly upon his mind that he had been in too unseemly a hurry to get away from John Woodhatch, and that John Woodhatch must have noticed it and been offended by it; and, the parson being a man with a conscience, this began to render him unhappy.

Why he had not asked John Woodhatch to accompany them, at the slack time of the farming season, when the harvest was all in, and John could have got away so easily, began to harass him too.

"I could have exeested in this unchreestian place with John, mayhap," he muttered; "but to be trapesing aboot by myself, and with never a soul to speak to, is a terreeble nuisance, and the sooner the law beesiness is settled, and Morice is well again, the better for a quiet Methodist like me, I'm thinking."

Finally the news came to him suddenly, and a day or two after the first examination of John Woodhatch at Lincoln; it startled him from the pages of a hastily scrawled letter of the gentleman left in charge of his little

chapel, and to whom he had sent his address and a request to know how the chapel-folk were getting on.

"You have doubtless heard the news of the man Woodhatch's arrest for the murder of your son-in-law," his correspondent added, in a light and almost airy postscript, "and I do not wonder at your keeping away from Lincolnshire as long as you can. I shall give no one your address until I receive permission to do so ; and as the next examination is not for a fortnight, you certainly should not hurry home. There is really nothing to be done—and there is no doubt in the public mind, or in mine, that John Woodhatch is the murderer."

Mr. Larcom sat down and wiped his forehead with his silk pocket-handkerchief. Was he dreaming, or was all this stern, sober, solid fact solid enough to crush him ?

It was fortunate that Lucy was not with him when the letter was received, for he could not make up his mind what course to adopt, and he thought it would be necessary to be cautious in communicating the news to his daughter. Of late days she appeared to have

recovered considerably in health and spirits ; her thoughts were not always of Morris and the mystery of his murder, and here was now the old, awful business to the front again, with a horrible sequel in which their one friend stood out as the villain of the piece. He did not believe it, and then he hoped he did not. There must be some wretched mistake—he had known John Woodhatch all his life ; but in what way Lucy would look at the matter now he could not tell. There was the powerful reminiscence of how Lucy Brake had looked at it five years since, when she was first struck down, and how this very Woodhatch was the man whom she had connected with the crime. True, she was grief-stricken and unnerved, and as she grew stronger she set the suspicion aside, and was sorry it had ever distressed her ; but now, with fresh evidence—evidence that had been considered strong enough to justify John Woodhatch's arrest—what would Lucy do ? He did not know, and he could not imagine. Never was a father who knew less of his daughter's thoughts and inclinations than Alec Larcom, for the reason that he had been

too much absorbed in his own occupation, his sermons and his flock—even in himself, be it said regretfully, and despite his many virtues—to trouble himself too deeply with a young woman's fancies. He had not understood Lucy five years ago, when she had deceived him and married without his consent—and he did not profess to understand her now, for all her quiet words, her sad thoughts, her general submissiveness of demeanour towards him, as though she would make amends by it for the past disobedience of her life. “Women are beyand me,” he had said to John Woodhatch before this. “I can preach at them, John, but I don’t make them out—not a scrap.”

He went forth that morning to a public library where the English papers were kept, and spent an hour in looking over them, and in arriving at a definite idea of all that had occurred from the evening of his departure from Skegs Shore. When he returned, there was a Lincolnshire newspaper waiting for him, with the details in full of the first examination of the master of Farm Forlorn.

He read the particulars carefully, with his face growing very grave and extra lined; with

the doubts on his mind increasing and gathering weight. It was so plausible a story, and he was one behind the scenes, who knew John Woodhatch better than the world did—who had known him years ago in Canada, and had helped to change him from a rough, desperate fellow to what he was at present. He had known him violent and strange enough; what if the old, bad blood had leaped to the front again in the moment of his disappointment, and in his anger against Morris for supplanting him?

He was not a hero, Alec Larcom. Naturally, he was a suspicious man, and a man of the world, who understood what evil might lie at the bottom of a fellow-creature's heart; he had never taken human goodness upon trust. He remembered all John Woodhatch's career at once, dating from his first murderous attack upon Gregory Dorward senior; he bore in mind the strange manner of John's latter days, the sudden change in him, the new mystery and eccentricity about him, and he linked it all with the story which had reached him from Skegs Shore.

"I hope it isn't true," he said; "but I am

dasperately afraid it is. It reads like truth to me."

Later in the day he broke the news to Lucy Brake. Little Morice was better, and pronounced out of danger. The child would be well in a few days again, it was said, and hence Lucy was stronger and brighter than she had been since her arrival in the French capital. Strong enough to hear the news, which her father was afraid might reach her from another source and wholly cast her down. It was his duty to tell her, and he had been a man always proud of doing his duty under adverse circumstances.

"Lucy," said he suddenly, after their late English supper, "I have had news from Skegs Shore to-day."

"To-day," was the quick reply, "and you have not told me before this! Ah! it is bad news. There is more trouble. We are not long in the sunshine, father."

"That's true. But, then, trooble is sent for——"

"Yes, yes, that is understood; but is it any the more bearable?" cried Lucy irritably.

"To a Chreestian, certainly, for——"

“What has happened to John Woodhatch?” she cried, interrupting him again; “for it is of him you are going to speak.”

“What made you think that?”

“I believe I have had foreknowledge of it,” said Lucy quickly. “He is on my mind so much; we left him in so dark a mood, and in so strange a way. He has not written to me as he promised. He asked my forgiveness for something which he was to tell me presently in a letter—poor, foolish John!—and that letter has not reached me. And now he has written to you instead; and it is bad news which has come to hand.”

“He has not written, but it is bad news.”

“I knew that. Well, what is it?”

Mr. Larcom coughed, and hesitated still. He approached the subject nervously, knowing that Lucy was so easily affected and dismayed. If she had been, throughout her life, less of an impulsive child, it would have been the better for herself and him.

“It is about John Woodhatch,” he said slowly.

“Yes, yes.”

“And poor Morris,” he added. “It is the

old story cropping up afrash, to the horror of us all. There, Lucy, you can read the rest of it," he said, tendering her the newspaper; "and for the Lard's sake read it calmly, and think it over calmly afterwards."

Lucy Brake snatched at the Lincolnshire paper, and gave a little cry at the ominous head-lines with which the editor had embellished his columns; then she set herself to master the contents—this new version of an old tragedy which had altered her whole life.

Mr. Larcom watched her nervously from the background, and took hope presently from the firm expression on the fair face before him. The truth had not wholly dismayed her, the past spectres rising up from their graves had not completely daunted her.

Lucy Brake would know the truth, the whole truth, or what these Lincolnshire folk were proclaiming noisily *was* the truth, and till then, at least, she was strong and self-possessed. There were no tears to fall from those blue wondering eyes, and though the lips quivered at portions of the evidence, they were set firmly and closely together afterwards.

When she had read the whole facts of the case against John Woodhatch, she folded the paper and returned it to her father.

"We must leave Paris as soon as possible," she said.

"Yes, my dear, I am completely tired of it myself," replied Mr. Larcom; "but there is no occasion for haste so far as this unfortunate case is concerned. But when the money matter is in a fair train of settlement, no one will be more glad to shake the doost of the ceety from his feet."

"We must go away to-morrow. I, at least, will go," said Lucy.

"To-morrow! Ye forget Morice will not be well enough to leave her bed," replied the father.

"I must leave Morice," was the extraordinary reply to this; and Mr. Larcom at once arrived at the conclusion that his daughter's brain had suddenly and completely turned, for Morice had been all and everything to Lucy, whose morbid, passionate love had made an idol of the child, and whose life had been absorbed in her, and in nothing else that lived and breathed and loved her.

"Leave Morice!" gasped forth the father.

"Yes. She is out of danger—completely out of danger, and in a few days will be well," said Lucy. "She and our nurse, and you, if you will, can follow me as speedily as you please, but I must go to him at once."

"Good grawcious!" exclaimed Mr. Larcom; "but why to him—and for what reason—and how? I—I don't see in the least, my dear, what ye poorpose doing."

"I don't know myself," cried Lucy, very wildly and helplessly at last; "but John Woodhatch is in trouble—his life is in danger—he has been unjustly accused, and we, his friends, must not keep away from him. We must be by his side in these cruel times to show we trust and honour him."

"Ye don't think, then—ye don't suppose he did it?" said the parson hesitatingly.

"I!" exclaimed Lucy passionately. "Why should I think so badly of him?"

"Well, my dear, if ye remember——"

"I remember nothing but that he is in prison," cried Lucy; "and I know the man so well, and the true and noble heart he has. He kill my husband!—he would have been his

best and stoutest friend had Morris lived, and Morris would have looked up to him as his guide. It is only people who have never known John Woodhatch who will, for an instant, think this deadly sin of him."

"Preceesely so. That's it," muttered the bewildered parson, losing all wish to argue the point, and feeling like a miserable hypocrite.

"I have only understood him of late days," continued Lucy. "I have learnt so much of him from poor Hester, and of the good he has sought to bring about. I have seen his efforts to think the best of all by whom he has been surrounded, his sorrow at those efforts failing him and the desperately wicked going their own way, until one has marvelled at his self-sacrifices. And this man to be charged with murder—oh! it is infamous."

"Preceesely so," said Mr. Larcom again. "He's a wanderful character is John—I never met a man like him. And yet I am poozled, too, as to why he wanted ye to forgeeve him."

"He would have afforded the man who killed Morris a chance of repentance, of salvation," she cried, "because he knew who he was and

was sorry for him ; because the man was Greg Dorward, father, and he had been so proud of Greg."

"Greg Dorward !" repeated Mr. Laroom ;
"what makes ye think of him ? "

"I am sure of it. I see it all," said Lucy thoughtfully.

"Greg Dorward !" said Mr. Larcom again ;
"that would accoont for much. Ye're wanderfully cute to-night, Lucy, or I'm dradfully dooll. My head aches fit to split, and the truth seems too hard for me to wrastle with."

"And the truth is very close to me to-night," was Lucy Brake's reply.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW IT MATTERED TO GREG.

By the last train which reached Skegs Shore the next night, Lucy Brake arrived in her native place. She had travelled from early morning to nightfall, impelled by the one wish to reach England, and comfort John Woodhatch by her own implicit belief in his innocence, by telling all with whom she came in contact that it was not the master of Farm Forlorn who had struck her husband out of life. She had travelled in company with the one maid-servant whom they had taken from Skegs Shore; she had left little Morice getting better, and in the best of hands; she had begged her father to remain in Paris for a few days longer; and, thinking only of John Woodhatch, and not considering

for an instant why she thought of him, thus strangely and forcibly, as one whose life she might brighten by her presence near him, and her faith in him—she had hastened away to England “more like a mad thing,” as her father had observed, “than a rational and senseable and respectable young female.” Lucy Brake it was who realized the true position of the accused, and what his feelings were under the awful charge which had been preferred against him; she knew he would neither protest his innocence, nor rave against those who thought him guilty; she was certain now that she had left behind her at Skegs Shore one deeply aggrieved and bitterly disappointed; a man who had given way rashly—and like a man—when she, the last faint hope he had had perhaps, had fled from him, with the rest of them. The stern sad face had been before her with every hour since her parting from him, and the words which he had said had been for ever ringing in his ears. He had been sure, despite *her* assurance, that she was going away for good, that he should not see her again. This had been the end of it, he had considered; and he

would have made it the end had he not been arrested that same night.

The cottage next the chapel had not been occupied by the gentleman acting as deputy in the absence of the Rev. Alec Larcom—the new-comer, being a bachelor, had preferred to put up at the Swan—and hence Lucy and the domestic took possession of the house without any of the neighbours being aware of their return until the following morning.

“Oh, they have found you out, then, and brought you back,” said one, at the first glimpse of Lucy the next morning, when she was equipped for a second journey, and this time to Lincoln, where John Woodhatch was.

“No; I am back of my own accord,” answered Lucy Brake; “it was my duty to come.”

“They’ll want you pretty soon as a witness, Mrs. Brake.”

“To the innocence of John Woodhatch—yes.”

The neighbour looked surprised, but said no more to her. On the contrary, scuttled away, being an old woman, with a fine, long

tongue of her own, to inform a second neighbour for what reason Lucy Brake had returned, and how she looked, just as "if she'd eat her up" if she went on talking.

Lucy went slowly, and in her deep mourning, to the churchyard where Morris was buried, and where his sister had joined him only last week. The train which would bear her part of the way to Lincolnshire was not due for three-quarters of an hour, and she could not rest indoors now that she was ready to depart. She would pay one visit to the grave, and murmur over it a prayer she might be guided to act rightly and justly in all she purposed to do, and that the truth might come quickly, and save the innocent.

It was a fine, bright morning, with Skegs Shore steeped in sunshine, and the lazy rooks floating in the sky above the big trees in the churchyard. All was at peace and rest, and those who saw the young widow passing through the village stepped aside out of her way, respecting the mission which they guessed was on her mind.

Still there were many watching her—and

some of whom she could not possibly have dreamed. And presently two of the latter, a man and woman, the former leaning on the woman's arm, and walking with difficulty, as though he was weak and ill, approached her in the churchyard.

The click of the latch of the gate had warned Lucy Brake of their approach, and the widow looked up quickly, like one ready to resent any intrusion upon her sorrow. Then she put her hands to her heart, as if to check a scream of surprise which might escape her in that instant of her consternation.

For it was Kitty Vanch who was approaching—she who had been called Kitty Vanch before Greg Dorward married her. And it was Gregory Dorward leaning on her arm, with a white, firm face which scared her by its new expression. And in the background, waiting in the dusty roadway, and glancing towards them now and then, was the third figure from the dark, bad past—the house-keeper of Farm Forlorn.

“Kitty,” she exclaimed, “why do you—and *he*—come to me at this time?”

"It was his wish to come," answered Kitty calmly, "and his wishes are mine."

Lucy looked at Greg, as if for the explanation.

"I will tell you," Greg said slowly, in answer to her mute appeal. "We are here to tell you all."

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE CHURCHYARD.

Was it more than chance that these three should meet at the grave of Morris Brake? Each thought so in that hour. Even the woman in the background, beyond the churchyard, quiet and watchful and silent, thought so too.

"How did you know I was at Skegs Shore?" asked Lucy of Kitty, and without heeding Greg's words; "have you been spying on me, either of you?"

"No," answered Kitty; "we thought you were in France until this morning."

"I returned last night," she said. Then she faced Greg Dorward, and, with a shudder she could not repress, added—

"And why have *you* come? What have you to tell me?"

His lips parted to address her, then he turned to his young wife, and said—

“Speak to her, Kitty. I dare not, after all.”

“Courage, Greg,” she replied.

“It is not lack of courage,” he said, “but I have not the right.”

Lucy looked from one to the other until Kitty spoke again, when she fixed her great blue eyes upon her wonderingly.

“Greg has come to ask forgiveness of that poor fellow lying there,” said Kitty, in a low, firm voice.

“Then—then he——”

As she paused, Kitty Vanch went on calmly—

“Yes. He killed Morris, and is going to Lincoln to confess it.”

“Oh, my God!” exclaimed Lucy fervently; “the truth comes out at last, and I have prayed for truth. And it was you, Greg Dorward—you, of all men, then?”

“Yes,” answered Greg.

He was content to answer, but he would hazard no explanation, which he left to Kitty now. He stood there with his face in shadow, and his dark eyes bent upon his victim’s grave,

a sad, stern figure, with all the light quenched from him.

"In a sudden quarrel brought about by watching Morris, with a sudden blow following an attack of Morris upon him, Greg Dorward killed your husband," Kitty continued; "that is the miserable history of it, neither more nor less, and he comes here to own the truth of it. In the sight of day, and, God be thanked, of his own free will."

"To save John Woodhatch—this?" exclaimed Lucy.

"To save the master," said Greg, in deep response; "yes."

The tears rose to the eyes of Lucy Brake, but she passed a hand before her eyes and dashed them away. She was excited, almost bewildered, by the avowal which had thus been made her. Before she could speak again, Kitty went on in a new and excited tone herself.

"So you see, Mrs. Brake—Lucy, if I may still call you so, being Greg's wife, that is—he is not so wholly bad, not so very bad, as God will judge him now and—presently. He has suffered for his crime, even in disguising

it—oh! more than he will ever own; he had hoped to live it down, and make atonement for it by a better life; he tried so hard, he did the best he could! Pray think this, if you can.”

“ I have not time to think,” said Lucy, in reply; “ it is all so sudden, and terrible, and just. Did *you* marry him, knowing what he was ? ”

“ Oh yes,” said Kitty. “ Why should I not ? He was ill, and in danger at Bolter’s Rents of going back to his old life, in sheer despair of God and man. I thought I could save him, and he and I,” putting her hand in his confidently and lovingly, “ have been together in all the troubles of our lives.”

“ Still—— ”

“ Still he is the man who killed your husband. Ah! we both know that,” cried Kitty, “ and we both are sorry. And, Lucy Brake, I want you to remember some day—not now, with your heart closed against him—that when the master was arrested, when we heard it first of all, it was Greg who was strong enough to say, ‘ He shall not suffer for the guilty, or my wretched life be spared at the expense of his.’ ”

"I will remember," said Lucy softly.

"And so," cried Kitty warmly, "John Woodhatch did not wholly fail with him, you see, but taught him love and gratitude. That's something, that's a great deal; and John Woodhatch will be glad."

"What do you intend to do, Greg Dorward?" asked Lucy, turning to him at last, but not looking at him; fearing even to look at him, with the truth so plain before them all.

"To proceed to Lincoln and give myself up," he answered very firmly.

"Now?"

"Yes, at once."

"And you wish to do this, Greg, with all your heart?"

"With all my heart," he answered.

"It is surely true atonement," she murmured; "and it makes amends for much. And you who love him wish this, too?" she asked, turning to Kitty again; "you, his wife!"

"Yes," answered Kitty, "though in wishing it I lose him."

"You are a brave woman, Kitty Vanch," said Lucy, "and Heaven will reward you."

“Heaven will reward me by bringing him back to me after a little while, I hope,” Kitty replied; “for I think—we all think and hope and pray—our story will be believed, and that this was not murder in cold blood, or murder that was contemplated. Believing that, Greg in good time—in God’s good time—will come back to me, to begin life afresh, with the blessing of the master on us, and the grace of your forgiveness.”

“And at—the worst?” asked Lucy fearfully.

“Well, then, we are prepared for it,” said Kitty, taking her husband’s hand in hers again, “and will look forward still, and—beyond!”

“For such repentance and faith there is surely pardon in Heaven,” Lucy replied, in a low, trembling voice; “and where He forgives, I have no right to stay the comfort which I may afford the guilty. Greg, you darkened my whole life when you killed poor Morris there, but I forgive you for it.”

She extended her hand to him, and, with a faint, stifled cry, he took it in his own and raised it very reverently to his lips. But he could not speak to her or look at her again.

The very darkness he had brought about, and of which she had just spoken, had brought round, too, his pity and his love for her, and a wild dream of making her life happy by way of atonement for his crime; but of this he could never speak, and she would always marvel why he had thought of the one woman in the world whom he had so cruelly injured.

"You are going to Lincoln?" she said again to Kitty.

"Yes; in a few moments we leave here."

"I—I was going, too," said Lucy. "I wished to be near John Woodhatch in his trouble, to assure him I did not for a moment place any credence in his guilt, and to be of help to him in any way I could. But I do not think he—he will need me now," she added hesitatingly; "and I may be in the way of him, or of—of any plans he may have. Tell him that, Kitty, when you see him, as you will see him soon, I hope."

"Yes, I will tell him," said Kitty, thoughtfully regarding her.

"And say I am very glad his innocence is proved. This, because I may not see him now to tell him so myself," she added.

"You remain at Skegs Shore?"

"Yes," answered Lucy.

"You will see him, then, I think."

Thus they parted, and Lucy went slowly away, noting that Greg Dorward and his wife moved a step or two more closely to the grave of Morris Brake. Mrs. Chadderton bowed as Lucy passed, but did not speak; on the contrary, went back a step or two till Lucy stopped her by a question.

"You are going with them to Lincoln, Mrs. Chadderton?" she asked.

"Yes, madam. Kitty will have need of me."

"God protect you all!" said Lucy Brake in answer.

CHAPTER IX.

UNSETTLED.

THERE was more news to excite and confound the intelligence of honest Lincolnshire, when it was spread throughout the country that young Greg Dorward had confessed to the murder of Morris Brake, and that John Woodhatch was wholly innocent. It was as everybody thought from the first, everybody took the liberty of asserting now; and those few who had stood by the farmer hard and fast and cheered his heart, after all, by the assertion of their faith in him, had extra reason to take credit for the clearness of their views.

Still the law's delay—which is proverbial and Shakesperian—did not open the prison doors of John Woodhatch's cell in an instant,

and on the mere word of one of his farm-pupils. The master of Farm Forlorn had been seen in the dark night on the sea-shore with Reuben Fladge, disinterring and then sinking deeper the evidence of the crime. The past rose up against him even, and the last act of his life, before his sudden arrest, had been a very desperate piece of business, verging closely on a further crime, or, at least, akin to madness. All this had to be considered, and the truth to be sifted from the false, before the order could be given for John Woodhatch's release. But John was very patient now, and very thoughtful; wondering at last at the love some people had for him. The prison rules were, to a certain extent, relaxed in his favour, it being thought that mere formalities were keeping him in gaol; and Reuben Fladge, though he took no more long walks, and with the excited prospect before him of his master's speedy restoration, was relieved from that rigid surveillance of the police, which had been more an inconvenience to the force than to himself, and had resulted in one constable being borne to his bed from sheer exhaustion,

and another being reduced to a sad and crippled condition of corns and bunions which had been abnormally developed by the most violent exercise.

Still Reuben Fladge could afford to be patient with the rest, and he looked the very personification of patience, standing day and night before the doors of the gaol, waiting for the master; always waiting for him to come forth, as people said he would soon, and never for half an hour together absent from the place—a faithful servant, for ever on the watch, and disregarding of the health and strength he wasted.

Once a tall young woman, dressed in black, touched him on the arm, and asked if he remembered her. He looked askance at her, and nodded his head.

“Oh yes, of course I do.”

“Is it wise to wait here, night and day?” asked Kitty.

“I’m afraid of losing him.”

“You are very faithful, Fladge, and the master will be proud of you,” said Kitty, “but it is not wise to watch so closely thus. To-day, now, he cannot possibly come.”

"Oh, you don't know," said Fladge doggedly.

"I think I do."

"He may come out of those doors at any moment," remarked Fladge; "that's where it is."

"You will be glad to see him?"

Reuben nodded. It was a foolish question, and hardly worthy of a nod. Glad to see him!

"I—I hope," said Kitty timidly, "that with your gladness you will be presently a little sorry for my Greg."

"Ah! yes, I s'pose I may be," was the careless answer.

"He saves the master," added Kitty.

"Anybody would have done that," muttered Fladge.

"Ah! no, Reuben," said Kitty, shaking her head; "the man repentant and anxious to take the sin upon himself is scarcer than you think."

"Do you think I wouldn't?" cried Fladge indignantly.

"Yes, you might," she replied, looking at him thoughtfully.

"And more than that," continued Fladge.

"I'd 'a said I killed the man, whether I'd done it or not, if I could have got anybody to believe me," he added, with a sigh over the general distrustfulness of his fellow-creatures.

"You loved the master, and so did Greg, with all his faults, poor fellow," said Kitty.

"Ay."

"We will wish happiness to John Woodhatch, at all events," she said, as she moved away.

Reuben Fladge looked after her wonderingly, as after some one who had talked too much to him and disturbed him; then he took an apple from his pocket, and munched it slowly, with his eyes fixed upon the prison gates. And so we leave him, a man with one idea.

Meanwhile Lucy Brake had evinced less patience than the rest of our characters; the only poor heroine we have, she was less heroical than those who had marred her life and made it what it was. She was even fidgety, and petulant, and inconsistent, like a woman crossed in every little wish, or in every big secret hope; she was unlike herself, and yet a very woman. She regretted twenty

times a day she had not gone to Lincoln—that she had altered her mind when the clouds were breaking away from the life of John Woodhatch; as if with the coming sunshine of fair fame and honour cleared she was afraid to meet him. As she was, though for a reason she could not explain and did not care to analyze.

When her father, with little Morice almost strong and well, returned from Paris—an event which occurred a few days afterwards—she was only better for a while, and whilst the novelty of their arrival was upon her.

After that she was again fretful and eccentric, irritated, justly perhaps, against the difficulties in the way of John Woodhatch's release.

To her father's stories of his Paris incidents she did not even profess to listen, but sat staring over his head when he had finished, and with her thoughts very far away.

"It's not much good talking to ye, Lucy," he said on one occasion, "for ye won't leesten the least bit in the warld."

"I can't."

"I've been telling ye that all's fair sailing with the praperty, and it will be all settled

in a moonth or two without our taking any further trooble about it, and—Lucy, what *are* ye thinking of, in the Lard's name, to pull that meeserable face?" he exclaimed very petulantly himself at last.

"I am miserable. Why is nothing done—with the guilty man owning to the crime, and the innocent locked up in prison still? This is not justice," she cried, "and it angers me, and makes me wretched."

"There's that stoopid beesiness of the fire, they say," replied Mr. Larcom, quietly filling his pipe, "and people can't make out why he should have doon it."

"He thought everybody had deserted him; he was disappointed in every one of us, and he was not his own firm self that night," she said. "I understand it all."

"I oonderstand he's a terreeble temper for all the good in him, and it's a marcy the farm was his own freehold and uninsured, though he mayn't get off quite clear, for all that."

"Not get off!" exclaimed Lucy. "Oh! don't say that."

"It's clear arson, if he owns he burned it

doon, I'm thinking," said Mr. Larcom. "And though he's done no one any harm, it was a vary mad proceeding. And yet a child can turn John Woodhatch, who is like a child in most things, trusting too much in everybody and everything. Which is a bad failing, Lucy, as I've told him twanty times, and twice twanty times for that matter, and he never a bit the better for it. And here's the result of it, ye see."

"I see nothing, but that you are losing time," cried Lucy sharply, "and neglecting your duty as a friend."

"What—what's that ye say?" exclaimed Mr. Larcom, in a loud voice.

"Is he not your friend?" said Lucy. "Has he not always been, father, the best friend you have ever had?"

"Wa'al, I canfess that."

"Then you are not acting like a friend by idling here at home," she cried. "Your duty is at Lincoln, using every means and every effort to set him free from these cobwebs which entangle him; sparing no money, employing the best men everywhere to fight his cause and get him out; doing everything in your

power, as he would have done, you know too well, for you."

"Blass and save us all!" ejaculated Mr. Larcom.

"I am a woman and helpless," she cried, "and the time hangs back so cruelly!"

Mr. Larcom put his pipe on the mantel-piece, buttoned his coat, and thrust his rusty hat on his head.

"Ye're right," he said. "I'll go, if I post all the way. Ye're not often right, mind ye, Lucy; but this time—joost for a change—I think ye are."

And, after that remark, Mr. Larcom started on his journey.

CHAPTER X.

AMONGST THE RUINS.

WHAT had turned Lucy Brake's thoughts so completely towards John Woodhatch, his fortunes and misfortunes, is difficult to say. It is always a difficult task to account for the vagaries of the sex, the satirist assures us. Certainly there had been a whirl of events of late days in the life of the Methodist parson's daughter, and she had been whirled round with it, and confronted with stern truths and many changes, and might still be confused and agitated, and "not herself at all."

She had come into money, without caring for money in any degree; she had been confronted with the scathing news of her late husband's love, or professed love, for Kitty Vanch; and regret his death as she might, the hero was no longer on the pedestal where

her devotion and sorrow had placed him. For ever before her was the uncomfortable thought of how a man so feeble or impressionable would have behaved through life, had life been spared him, and the certain assurance that much unhappiness would have come in its time to dispel the fair illusions she had had of his character and his affection for her. And then, before she had had time to consider this, and mourn for this, there followed Miss Brake's death, John Woodhatch's farewell of her, the journey to Paris, the burning of the farm, and the arrest for murder. It was unnecessary haste, after all, with which she had flown home, only to remain supine and helpless, and pray for better times. She had written to John Woodhatch a few lines of consolation—if words from her could convey any consolation, she thought, very humbly now—and there had come an answer back in a line or two of thanks, no more, as though he had not the wish to write, and yet had felt compelled to answer her.

Yes, his troubles distressed her more than she could have possibly imagined that they would, great as they were, and affecting her

own life with his—pages in the same story. He had suffered so much, he had been so acutely disappointed in all that he had schemed for, he had been so unselfish amidst a crowd of people, thinking only of themselves; and at last he had been—poor John!—so desperately reckless, that it was doubtful how the law would consider his last act. Would it even believe Greg Dorward's confession to be anything else save another mad fellow's freak—that insane craving for a notice in the newspapers which besets the British mind, and would be rather connected with a murder case than for “ever out of print,” and thus cruelly ignored?

Mr. Larcom disappeared into space, as it were, for Lucy heard no more from him. He did not write to his daughter—it had not entered into his mind to be “bothered” by any correspondence; and so Lucy was left to distress herself, which she did very successfully, as to the progress of events at Lincoln, where were all the principal characters of the tragedy—if it were to end like a tragedy, and as the cruel delay and uncertainty appeared almost to warrant.

Still there was hope, more hope than she believed. The neighbours were quite certain of a satisfactory result, so far as John Woodhatch was concerned ; the newspapers were as "cock sure" about it as newspapers generally are ; and all would be well in time, if time would only move a little faster.

She would wait another day and go to Lincoln, she thought. One more day, and receiving no missive from her father, she would leave Skegs Shore again. She must be one of the principal witnesses in the case, having been almost the last to see Morris Brake alive. Why did no one communicate with her in this crisis ?

That day she and little Morice walked along the sands to Farm Forlorn—never looking so forlorn and grim as in that hour, with its blackened walls, its roofless, windowless aspect, and its great gaps to the sky, with its charred timbers still stretching intact from side to side of the old farm, and its *débris* of ruin strewn about the ground. A terrible wreck, a still more terrible monument of man's despair and passion ; a black blot upon a fair green landscape, for Lucy to shudder at

that early autumn day, with little Morice cowering in the folds of her mother's skirts. A blot, too, upon the fair, strong life of its owner, to show he was very weak and—very human.

"Yes, this is Farm Forlorn, indeed," said Lucy, with a sigh.

John Woodhatch had prophesied she would never come back to it, and she had smiled a little at his prognostication, knowing so much better than he that he was in the wrong. But it was all stern truth, and there was no return, only to the wreck—the grim witness of where the farm had stood, and how the hopes had shrivelled up with its destruction.

There were tears swimming in Lucy's eyes as she gazed at the ruin; the ruin of one man's life seemed to be marked by it, too, and she, at least, could have altered it by a word. And if that word had been spoken, what would have been the end of it to him, or her? Surely something more full of promise than the utter collapse of one honest home, one earnest life.

She walked with Morice into the garden, where she had talked with John Woodhatch

before she went away, and where he spoke in riddles to her, and looked at her with his grave face the while. Here there was but little change; the neighbours' children having spared it, and more than one neighbour's hand having kindly helped to keep it bright and trim for the sake of the master who might come back at any moment now—for who could tell?

Who could tell, indeed? For suddenly through the gate across the fields there came John Woodhatch, with his old quick strides, towards her; the same man whom she had ever known, with his frank, clear face aglow with health and hope, despite the shade of sorrow in it—a sorrow, as it were, for others suffering for his sake, and who had taken his place so that he might go free. A noble return even in a criminal, and a poor penitent like Greg Dorward, of whom there should be surely hope some day.

John Woodhatch's sudden appearance was too much for the overwrought feelings of Lucy Brake; she had not thought to find him there, she had not believed he was at liberty and at Skegs Shore again, and she burst into tears and

ran towards him—stopping before she reached him in alarm at her own impulse, and colouring very much.

But he was at her side very quickly, too, when she sobbed forth, “I am so glad you have come back, John! I—I did not think you would be here so soon.”

“There, there, don’t cry,” he said, taking both her hands in his; “you have never been one to shed tears—even of joy. And if it *is* joy——”

“Yes—it is,” she confessed at once.

“Then, surely I am happy.”

He stooped and kissed her forehead, and she did not shrink away from him. That was all the love-making between them then and for some time afterwards, but from that very moment they knew each other better than they had done in all their lives, and neither from that instant of their meeting surveyed the land ahead—the land over which their track together was yet but faintly marked—with dull, sad looks and heavy sighs, as though the sunshine was never more for either.

They did not speak of love one word; that was to come when John Woodhatch was more

assured that forty-five might be a fitting match for three and twenty, taking the entire facts into consideration, and remembering how patiently he had waited for her, and in all his life had cared for no one else ; when Lucy was disposed, too, to see the happiness beyond the present time, and link her life with his, making both bright to the end of their days.

In this time of their meeting, they simply walked arm-in-arm together in the garden of Farm Forlorn, and talked of the past and future, like two old friends who had had never a thought of parting between them. They spoke of the one wild act of John Woodhatch at Skegs Shore, and what would come of it.

“I don’t think they will hurt me,” said the farmer, with a smile, “as I have hurt no one but myself. I was very miserable that night, and awfully alone. But it was rash.”

“Yes, John, it *was* a little rash,” said Lucy quaintly.

“Still, I may hear no more about it.”

And he did not ; and presently a new farm, which he called Farm Felicity—a happy augury of his new life to come—was erected on the

old site, and peace and love and faith became presently the household fairies there.

They spoke of Greg Dorward also and of Kitty.

"Your teaching was not wholly in vain," said Lucy, "when they would not let you come to harm, those two."

"No, not in vain," answered John Woodhatch thoughtfully.

"And Greg—what will they do to him?"

"They will give him a light sentence for manslaughter, the lawyers think; they will consider his youth, the provocation, and his frank confession, and in a year or two, perhaps less, he may begin life again—life abroad, possibly—under fair auspices, with a true woman at his side to keep him hopeful, and on the right road to the end. I try to see that picture in the future."

And it was near the truth, as if John had had a prophet's vision in that hour.

"I hope the colours are not too bright, and I am not too sanguine," he added, with a reserve, at last.

"You were always sanguine, John, until the last days of Farm Forlorn," she said.

“ Yes, that’s true. And then ? ”

“ Ah ! we will not speak of that again.”

They walked away from the farm, and once more along the sands to the broad shining sea; they went from the garden of Farm Forlorn to the village nestling in the shadow of the church; from the ruin of a home and the record of a rash act to the Methodist’s little cottage, where Alec Larcom waited for them; from the despair of ever doing any good, to the hopes which would grow stronger every day, and blossom into love and trust.

And in the far distance, and at a most respectful distance, but with their watchful eyes upon one figure always, lest it should melt away as in a dream; and this should not be reality after all, but only fancy born of vain imaginings, trudged Reuben Fladge and Carlo, the two who had been faithful to him when all the rest had seemed to turn away.

Only seemed ! For John Woodhatch had been a man of many fancies, and it had been pure fancy that his friends had failed him.

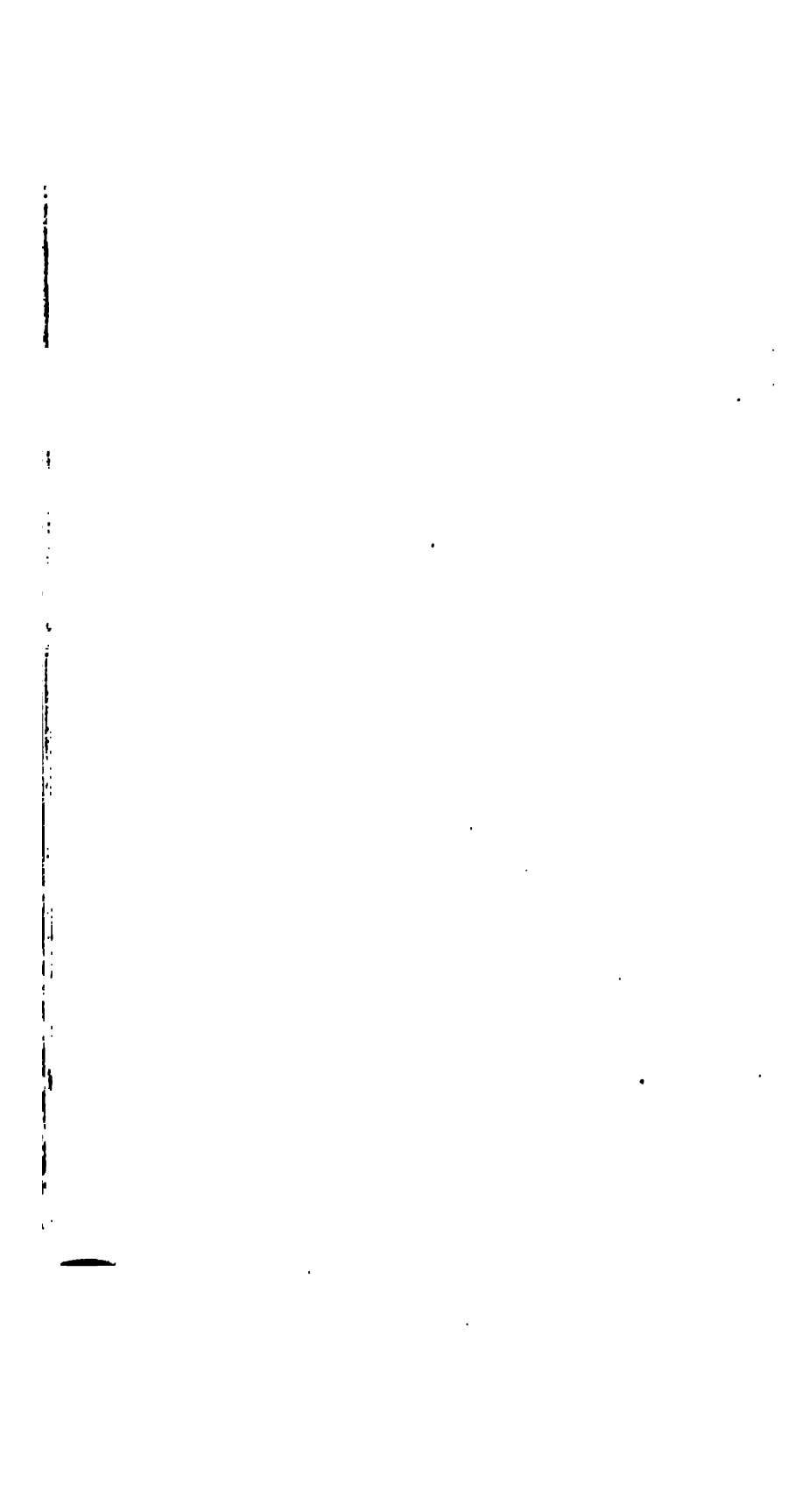
“ If you had asked me to remain and be your wife, John, on that day father and I left the farm,” said Lucy some months afterwards,

when he had asked in earnest, and she had answered "Yes," "I should not have said 'No.' And I—I thought you would before I went away."

"It was a thought you kept wonderfully well to yourself," he replied, with a hearty laugh, and as men can laugh at past trouble always; "but, then, I do not profess to understand human nature now, especially feminine nature, and especially Lucy Brake."

But they understood each other very well, and knew that there was as fair sailing in life's stream before them as on the broad, deep sea at which they gazed, and where the distant ships with their great white wings outspread passed slowly to their journey's end.

FINIS.



[December, 1882.]



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